

**Tavistock Clinic and University of East London**

Professional Doctorate in  
**CONSULTATION AND THE ORGANIZATION**

Doctoral Thesis

**A SCHOOL IN MIND**

‘An Investigation of the stresses, pressures and challenges  
faced by Primary School Head Teachers in a context of  
organizational change in schools.’

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## **ABSTRACT:**

This thesis is based on a research study conducted into the experiences of head teachers in their role of leaders in primary schools. Using biographical interviews, the study examines how participants have negotiated periods of change and challenge in their professional role. I will also consider how personal and professional biographies converge in participants' understanding of role, leadership, organizational change and stress, and how wider organizational, political and social forces impacted upon those in role.

The thesis will then go on to explore and attempt to extend some of the thinking related to the concept of the organization-in-the-mind (Armstrong, 2005), which appeared, through the narratives of each participant to have considerable relevance to their understanding of professional role and indeed perhaps more significantly their performance in role.

**Key words: education, primary school, head teachers, stress, organizational change, the organization-in-the-mind.**



*'I hear the voices of those who cannot be drowned.'*

**Benjamin Britten**

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This research explores, through biographical interviews, the experiences of head teachers in relation to leadership in education in times of organizational change. It is a small study, but one which I hope may provoke some thinking in this area.

Schools are very much part and product of a changing fabric in society. Although this research is primarily based on the experience of head teachers in primary schools, it has, I believe, wider relevance to management and professional practice within other contemporary public sector organisations, as well as the body of knowledge that forms a systems psycho dynamic approach to organizational consultancy.

The core of the study lies in the case studies of individuals, both in their life journeys and professional trajectories, and the changing educational and organizational vista that formed a backdrop to their experiences. It is a key aim of this research to make visible the experiences of those who have leadership roles in schools, and to understand the nature and contexts in which their experiences have arisen. The research will move beyond the subjective voice of participants as social actors in the educational arena, to a more generalised holistic analysis of the profession.

These biographical studies throw light on the experiences and challenges for primary school head teachers in negotiating transitions from one educational milieu to another. Changes, increasingly necessitated by shifts in wider society, appeared to create both risks and opportunities for the participants in this study.

The everyday professional lives that are described within this report are extraordinary in their complexity, richness and diversity, and will provide insights that go beyond personal interpretation. These individual narratives invoke a wider historical, political and societal frame in which they have

been lived. I hope they will also evoke something of your own social and organizational experiences, as indeed they have mine.

## **Structure of Report**

The thesis is divided into four parts. Firstly, the background is provided for the study, including the reasons for selecting this area of research, and a review of relevant literature. This is followed by research questions and a description of the research methodology.

The second section looks at 'research types'. It provides detailed descriptions of the participants' narratives and attempts to draw out wider stories, which may highlight different aspects of the professional context in which they have arisen. As my introduction suggests, this is the key part of the study.

The third section, made up of three chapters, provides a more in-depth analysis, looking at particular themes arising from the interviews in a collective and broader sense. These areas appear to have been pertinent in varying degrees to all participants' narratives.

The fourth and final section returns to explore what became a key concept in relation to this study – the organization-in-the-mind (Armstrong, 2005). I will attempt to extend some of the thinking around this conceptual framework by using and taking forward some of the observations and understandings I have developed. This is followed with a series of recommendations, and a brief conclusion drawing together thoughts and themes from earlier sections.

All details of participants (their names, their work place, names of colleagues and geographical reference) have been changed to avoid identification and to maintain confidentiality.



## Chapter 2

### Choosing an Area of Research

I am not an educationalist. I have never been a teacher or head teacher and I have no wish to be. Nor could I do that job, despite the rapidly reducing time-scales now required to train.

With the exception of the last sentence, this is how I have tended to start my introduction to head teachers when discussing the possibility of consultancy. I give it largely to illustrate that I am not there to tell them how to do their job and, indeed, to indicate that I will not be in competition with them for that job. Many have seen this as evidence of my sanity, with '*at least you're not mad then*' being a fairly standard response to this initial preamble.

My professional background is in social work. I have held a number of managerial positions in which I have not only had regular supervision but also consultancy. These experiences led me in part to train as an organizational consultant.

I have been consulting to head teachers for a period of 5 years. In that time, I have consulted to well over twenty individuals who have referred themselves for a variety of reasons: personal and professional development; support with disruptive team dynamics; and, consultancy for management of change programs and in some cases preparation for schools closure. However, the overwhelming reason (whether stated or not) at the time of referral has been, and continues to be, stress.

While shocked at the levels and degrees of stress I have seen in individuals, I have also been surprised at the lack of support that has been available from within their own organizations. Despite support being offered to schools in relation to children, there appears to be limited support available to staff and head teachers themselves. In my experience, the cost to the individual and to the organization is great.

I began offering consultancy to head teachers when, as a manager of a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), I had noticed high numbers of referrals for children coming from particular schools. Although some of the children referred did have some difficulties, when the matter was explored further it became apparent that the staff team within the schools had high levels of stress and dysfunction. Not unsurprisingly, the head teachers also appeared to be stressed and overwhelmed. I offered some consultancy sessions which were generally well received. Slowly, the referrals for children were reduced.

My understanding at the time was that the head teachers had felt so overwhelmed that they had no further capacity to emotionally contain the concerns of staff. In turn, the staff team was also at full stretch and was unable to cope with even minor disruptions. The emotional tolerances in these institutions were set so low that any misdemeanor was felt to be unmanageable and quickly exported to another service, in this case CAMHS. In this way, staff referred not only children but their own anxieties. Where else was it to go?

A pilot program was developed, and I began to offer organizational consultancy specifically to head teachers within my work role. The pilot went well, good feedback was received and the program was extended and then extended again.

As a result of my consultancy practice and through this study, I have come to understand that I have some deep seated ideas and feelings about education and learning. I suggest that we all have a 'school in the mind.'

Reading back through my research diary, I find a preoccupation with half – thoughts, beta elements perhaps (Bion, 1967), that would later become thoughts and ideas defined within my research questions. The diary starts near Aldeborough, on a beach just north of the town. I remembered being intrigued at the inscription on Maggie Hambling's Sculpture '*Scallop Shell*', built to celebrate the British Composer Benjamin Britten (who apparently would frequently walk along the beach here). The sculpture is engraved with a quote from the Opera Peter Grimes: '*I hear the voices of*

*those who cannot be drowned....'* Somehow, in my mind, I linked it to Isabel Menzies-Lyth and her comments about mini disasters in society (1989). She describes how, when focusing on major disasters, we lose sight of or turn a blind eye to the obvious distress before us. I also wondered about our own internal voices: the voices we carry inside ourselves from our earlier experiences, our own not quite forgotten memories which continue to have influence, thoughts and images that perhaps can also never be drowned but which continue to impact on us every day frequently in ways beyond awareness.

I noted Benjamin Britten's words, for the Opera was his, in my diary. This first entry stared back at me accusingly for a few days, indicating my restricted imagination and a lack of plausible research topics. Later, I found the quote to be a passage that is sung by the fisherman 'Grimes', who is haunted by the death of an apprentice boy who died on his boat. I would recall this story later when one of the participants, recalling a point of personal and professional anguish, spoke of a recurring nightmare: a child dying in his school.

The diary entries gradually took more shape and become more focused, developed and contributed to both by my tutors, my consultancy work with head teachers and more detailed and in depth reading of the systems psycho dynamic literature.

A later diary entry (4<sup>th</sup> November, 2006) reads:

*'Musing about the program 'Talking Cure' - with Anton Obholzer – Mr Brind. It is described as the story of a successful school with a dedicated head teacher, but also an emotional minefield where sickness is saved for the holidays. I am reminded of a head teacher who I saw for consultancy last week, who previously was attending group therapy for occupational stress. He found himself shocked to find, at the initial meeting, that more than two thirds of the group worked in education. He didn't go back. Another recalled that when he had visited his Doctor, the Doctor had described the situation in schools, in relation to stress, as a hidden epidemic!*

My mind strayed over many different areas after these initial thoughts, but it is interesting that right at the start there were seeds for later thinking. They also represent some of the influences on me, informing my view point and later subjectivity. This subjectivity, the set of optics that I would bring to the research, was also very much part of the initial preoccupations featuring in early diary entries. I noted Sartre's view as a warning;

*'I am beginning to believe that nothing can ever be proved. These are reasonable hypotheses that take the facts into account: but I am only too well aware that they come from me, that they are simply away of unifying my own knowledge...slow, lazy, sulky, the facts adapt themselves at a pinch to the order I wish to give them, but it remains outside of them. I have an impression of doing a work of pure imagination. And, even so, I am certain that characters in a novel would appear more realistic, or in any case would be more amusing.'* Jean Paul Sartre (1965:26)

In choosing this as an area of research I have questioned my own, possibly deeper, motivations: the 'me-search' aspect of the research. This is essentially a new professional field to me. Some motivation arises from a personal experience which saw me, at age eleven, attending support groups in school for reading and writing. I recall this as a positive experience. I suspect in some part that I had felt largely invisible and voiceless amidst the competing needs of a large comprehensive structure, which served areas of high social need.

I have a fond memory of one teacher who took an interest in me. He had persevered through my lack of ability to spell, or indeed to understand grammar, describing me in my yearly report as having the 'makings of a scholar.' I was twelve years old. A seed and a belief was planted which, twenty - eight years later, finds me researching education for my Doctorate, and on another level, perhaps still trying to compensate for those feelings of academic and social inadequacy that were part of my school experience.

I also have memories of violence and of bullying from pupils and from teachers, of fights in classrooms and of teachers appearing overwhelmed in class. I have a distant memory of a young

science teacher having a '*breakdown*', although at the time I had little understanding of what this meant, except he had a year off school and appeared changed, strangely distant, on his return.

As a trainee social worker, I worked as a Counsellor in a school, a service for both children and staff. No staff ever referred themselves, although a regular number came to speak to me about children they felt they might want to refer. Interestingly, a referral was not always needed after these meetings.

Furthermore, my wife is an Australian qualified teacher who works in a primary school in England. Through her, I have developed an understanding of the stresses and frustrations of classroom teaching, which also appears to be the experience of a number of her colleagues. Interestingly, '*I forgot*' this when I first thought about my motivations, and have taken the oversight to mean it is a significant factor in my choosing to research in this arena.

Finally, my son and daughter have both started school in the last three years. I have been aware of an anxiety in relation to this and an awareness of passing some degree of parental responsibility over to those who teach and work in the school. It is a question which I have found myself directly faced with time and again - what kind of school, what kind of teacher do I want to educate and care for my children?

Awareness and knowledge of my own experience will, in some part, allow me to understand and consider the potential impact upon this study. I have also been aware of my own experience of stress and how I have sought to manage this, as well as my own trajectory into the profession I have chosen. This has not always been comfortable. It is hard not to consider these questions for self when considering the lives and pathways of others.

In thinking about this 'other' organization, I find parts of myself - a line of biographical inquiry which in itself may also be significant in my choice of research methodology.

Throughout my consultancy practice, I have been struck by the high levels of stress in the people I have seen. Internal and external pressures to reach what appear to be at times unrealistic targets are reported alongside breakdowns and stress, high levels of sickness, tensions and dysfunction within staff teams. Not surprisingly, this is accompanied with staff leaving prematurely and difficulties in recruitment.

The overall picture appeared complex. Personal and professional histories seemed to provide a good psychological fit between individuals and their roles, but amid considerable institutional change, the 'organization in the mind' (Hutton, Bazalgette, & Reed, 1997) of head teachers did not appear to fit well with the current situations they were managing. Head teachers had to take account of many different domains and demands – from children, parents, teachers, and the wider community and local and national government – and what emerged from this complexity was often a very fragmented picture of what a school was supposed to be. Head teachers I met often seemed to be trying to make sense of this, and to be trying to pick up all the pieces.

So, my main research title – ***'An investigation of the stresses, pressures and challenges faced by primary school head teachers in a context of organizational change in schools'*** – is my attempt to understand some of what I have seen, and continue to witness, within my consultancy practice.

## Chapter 3

### Literature Review

This research was a study of head teachers and their experiences of leadership at a time of organizational change in schools from a specific point of view – a systems psychodynamic perspective. Within this section I will present a review of the literatures most relevant to this research study, from the perspectives of both its context, and its theoretical grounding and framing. This will, I hope, establish the specific contribution that this study will be able to make. In a later chapter I will set out the research method I adopted and developed, showing how this relates to the theoretical and empirical concerns of the thesis.

As a consultant to head teachers I had become aware that many appeared to be deeply troubled in their occupational roles, and of the complex origins of these states of mind. It became clear that the experiences of these individuals had both an internal and external dimension. An internal dimension in the aspirations and anxieties they brought with them into role, and their work situations and an ‘external’ dimension through the environment itself, especially related to changes within the profession over the last few decades.

My hypothesis was that some individuals brought with them, on entering the profession, particular formations of values, goals and needs which at the time of occupational entry served them well and provided a good match between individual and the environment and occupational culture they found on joining. However, severe dissonance was created between their ‘formation’ which included both internal, cultural, and ideological constructs, and what was now being required of them in a changing occupational environment and culture. What I learnt and came to understand from the research participants’ enabled me to elaborate and extend this hypothesis.

To understand this further I needed to establish what theoretical and conceptual resources were needed to enable me to comprehend this situation. The most recent work in the Tavistock tradition of organizational consultancy was of the most direct relevance. However, before I consider the

insights delivered by this, both theoretical and conceptual, I will first consider the research and literature that has been conducted within education to demonstrate what has been established, and what may have a bearing on this study. I will therefore start in this chapter with an account of these studies.

### **Relevant Educational Research**

Kyriacou (1987, 2001) who draws together and summarizes many of the studies on stress in education, defines stress in this sector as,

*'the experience of teachers of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration, depression, resulting from aspect of their work as a teacher.'* (2001:28).

Early on there is a high dropout rate in this profession. Friedman (2000) concentrates on stress as the result of reality shock, citing the 30% drop out rate of newly qualified teachers in their first year (Rozenholtz 1989 quoted in Friedman, 2000) - a result of a *'rude awakening from an idealistic dream and the shattering of anticipations of an enjoyable and satisfying professional career of service'* (2000:598). This research, based on a self report study of newly qualified teachers, revealed some significant declines in self efficacy as participants were not able to maintain the high standards they had once sought.

Travers & Cooper (1997) compared a cross national sample of teachers: 22% of sick leave in England as opposed to 1% in France was attributed to stress. This may suggest that stress is influenced by factors which are not intrinsic to teaching. Compared with their French counter parts, English teachers reported more problems with long hours, political interference and overwork.

Studies have indicated that the most influential factor in a successful school is the head teacher (Clerkin, 1985, Green, 2000) however there have been limited studies of head teachers and stress. One of the most striking surveys was conducted by the National Association of Head Teachers in May 2000, suggesting that stress levels in head teachers are rising, with more than a third of absent



rates being due to work related stress. The results make shocking reading showing that 40 % of respondents had visited their Doctors with stress related symptoms: 20% felt they drank too much, 15% believed they were alcoholic, and 25% experienced depression, hyper tension, insomnia, depression or gastrointestinal disorders.

The National Association of Head Teachers went on to suggest that four out of five head teachers were considering early retirement and many were reporting burn out in their forties. There is more than a whiff of self interest and special pleading here - the NAHT are not neutral observers, and as such they are perhaps a potentially biased source of data.

However, the NAHT are not a lone voice. In relation to teachers and head teachers the NAHT, is one of a growing number of sources that indicate high levels of stress within the profession. The introduction in 1992 of the Office for standards in Education (OFSTED) and the practice of inspection has some studies suggest been traumatic, leading to feelings of exhaustion and even depression following an inspection (Ferguson, 1999, Scanlon, 1999). Alongside this, high proportions of teachers within these samples described higher rates of sickness and significant increases in levels of stress correlated to the grading schools received on inspection; 43% of staff in schools in special measures and 32% for staff in those not in special measures.

Even before the changes introduced by the Education Act of 1988, it appears that Educational professionals represented a discontent group. Travers and Cooper (1996) highlighted that discontentment had increased, finding that 66% of their sample of teachers had actively considered leaving in the last five years. But clearly people do not leave in such numbers. Having placed much of their 'career capital' in a secure profession premature leaving would carry significant costs. In these circumstances perhaps early retirement provides an easier alternative and a common solution to career dissatisfaction. Retirees after all have at their disposal a pension and are generally not as encumbered with family commitments, allowing some to leave with income and the chance to try other professional avenues before it is too late.

Pithers and Soden (1998) suggest that stress in teaching was not as widespread as predicted. Incidences of stress, according to this study, were not significantly higher than other occupational groups. However, this is a finding that is contradicted by other, more recent research which suggested that teaching had become the most stressful profession in the UK (HSE, 2000).

Hepburn and Brown (2001) take a broader view, suggesting that teachers use the construct of stress as a way of managing accountability and as a way of understanding changing relationships within their institutional role. They warn of the dangers in perceiving stress as an individual problem, which has allowed teachers and their employers to manage at an individual level rather than engage in debate about the state of the profession. They point to a shift in research in the 15 years prior to this study from the pupil to the teacher, suggesting that teachers are now seen as the carrier of stress in the day to day functioning of schools.

Research prior to the 1988 Education Reform Act indicates that primary schools functioned in a simple manner: a small staff team under the leadership of the head teacher. Teachers had considerable autonomy within their classrooms and the underlying culture was one of collaboration (Nias, 1989). The head teacher was seen as the educational leader of the school, while issues related to resources, staffing, admissions and transfers were coordinated by the Local Education Authority (LEA).

Primary schools are relatively small organizations, employing on average around 30 staff. The Education Reform Act 1988, part of a raft of the Conservative government reforms of education, would have an enormous impact on these institutions, introducing the devolution of financial controls, new powers for governors, open enrolment and the chance to opt out to grant maintained status. Alongside these changes, systems of school appraisal were established, along with whole school planning and performance related pay, all of which heralded a shift to competitive practice and the 'marketization' of schools (Mentor, 1999). In short a business model of service delivery.

*'The model of organization which the ERA implies is clear: it is that of governors as Board of Directors and Head Teacher as Chief Executive.'* Ball 1990:67

There were two components to these reforms: firstly educational process elements (the national curriculum, national assessment and inspection arrangements); and the second, a more structural component, open enrolment (changes in the governance of schools, and opting out). Mentor (1999), reminds us of the political philosophies behind these reforms, suggesting that the two elements are representative of a new right ideology: one, the processing element represents a moral authoritarian tendency; and the second, a structural component, is representative of the drive for economic liberalism. Not comfortable philosophical bed fellows. And while a deep contradiction is apparent, Whitty (1989) has indicated that they may indeed be complementary: a common structure through performance indicators and league tables, and diversity through various providers.

These studies, outlined above, which consider the new public sector management ideology and approach, make substantial and influential contributions which offer some explanations to the findings of this study and the stories of participants. They are a major reference point for the changing nature of schools management and the new disciplines imposed on the school system and the workforce which as I will show will form the backdrop and contexts to the narratives of participants.

Forrester (2000) suggests tensions between professionalism and managerialism exist as a source of conflict in education that has been supported by successive political administrations. Linking to the point above, systems of governance have been systematically restructured, simultaneously centralizing direction and content while decentralizing responsibility to individual schools. Structural changes have increased head teachers responsibility while restricting professional autonomy, central control has been increased and a culture of management and accountability reinforced across schools.

The Education Reform Act 1988 effectively created a quasi market within education and introduced a new organizational culture across schools. Studies since this date have largely continued to chart the impact of further changes on the profession. It is important to note that much educational policy development has taken place on the back of research conducted in secondary schools (Ball, 1994). This is, perhaps, unfortunate. There are similarities, but as sites of sociological study, primary schools appear to have significant differences with their larger secondary cousins.

It is not only a matter of scale, although this is indeed a factor. These organizations, joined by a common purpose, have numerous points of difference; the gender composition of the work force, (far more men work in secondary schools compared with primary schools, and primary schools overall are largely staffed by women), the developmental stages of the children to whom they provide a service, and the culture and management ethos has also been described as being considerably different (Mentor, 1999).

An earlier study (Cooper and Kelly, 1993) of occupational stress amongst head teachers found that primary school head teachers were experiencing far higher levels of job dissatisfaction than their colleagues in secondary school. The two main causes of stress were given as work overload and handling relationships with staff. The researchers concluded that stress was more prevalent in primary schools for a number of reasons; the small size and limited economies of scale including lack of clerical support; their relative lower status and the widely held perception that these were less demanding environments; and finally, the amount of teaching cover that head teachers had to provide. This is a fascinating finding. A further explanation might be that head teachers in primary schools are having to mediate bureaucratic/ marketising changes to staff teams (which are driven by different basic assumptions – see later) and therefore bear the strain of this more readily than their secondary cousins – who are perhaps more able to push the strain downwards onto staff with rather different valencies. Some of the primary head teachers interviewed for this study appeared to be

trying to protect their (largely female) staff teams from the wider environment by holding the strain themselves - in one case at severe personal cost.

Poor working conditions, poor relationships with colleagues, workload and work overload (Travers and Cooper, 1997, Wynne, 1991) pressures of time, alongside poor school 'ethos', all form part of a catalogue of factors that have been named in studies as the cause of teachers stress. Role overload was highlighted in the Pithers and Soden study (1998). It suggested that employees struggled to cope with a high number of competing roles within their main work role, and this appeared to be one of the most significant sources of strain for both English and Australian teachers (both of whom featured in the study).

Those head teachers who had been in the profession longer appeared more weighed down by increasing responsibilities and in some instances, in the face of role changes, had simply increased their duties to accommodate. Others, generally newer head teachers, perceived their role in a different manner and because of this appeared to be less burdened by historical expectations and more able to push the burden downwards onto staff or outwards through substantial networking and inter agency co operation.

Timperley and Robinson (2000) acknowledged that teacher workload had increased over the decade prior to their research (and since the Education Reform Act, 1988), but question whether this is the only reason for higher levels of stress in education. Certainly, many Scottish studies posit a link between stress, organizational change and increased workload (Hall, 2000).

Workload maybe a significant factor, but as Timperley and Robinson (2000) point out, many teachers still appear to cope, albeit by working longer hours, so this correlation does not seem as straightforward as it at first appears. What is apparent is that teachers themselves appear to view stress in environmental terms, both in relation to intrinsic and systemic factors, something confirmed by Travers and Cooper study (1997).

Classroom discipline was also identified as a source of stress (Travers and Cooper, 1997). Others, Lewis (1999) and Morton (1997), highlighted pupil management and behavior as an occupational stressor and a continued source of anxiety which, interestingly, did not appear to diminish with teaching experience. Pupil behavior is a consistent finding, and frequently overlooked when considering the similar expectations placed on schools with widely differing populations.

To understand why this is we need to go to the study conducted by Rutter (1979). Rutter had demonstrated that, even taking into account differences at intake, schools had a significant impact through culture and ethos, as well as their direct approaches to individual pupils. Highlighted within the study was the degree that teacher expectations influenced pupil's behavior and academic attainment. High expectations and high levels of trust through delegated responsibility resulted in better attendance and less delinquency. This study was tremendously influential in the way schools (in particular, failing schools) have been viewed and supported over the last three decades.

The findings were used to shift the previous emphasis on 'structural' explanations for the relative success of schools i.e. social class intake being a variable in success. On one level it was a substantial and informative piece of research demonstrating the difference organization, culture, and morale could make to outcomes. But it was also misleading. The inference drawn by politicians from this research was that any school should be able to produce results irrespective of intake characteristics. It has become the 'stick' that many schools and head teachers in socially disadvantaged communities have been beaten with in subsequent years where the average or less than average has been attacked by the example of the exceptional. Alongside this league tables and covert selection methods have increased inequalities at intake with direct impact on head teachers in socially deprived areas who, because of the emphasis on schools leadership, are seen as failing.

Although structural explanations are also not without problems - producing a rather fatalistic view which in turn sets up low expectations - the assumptions stemming from the current omnipotent

management perspective ignore one key aspect of the Rutter study: social class, as a variable, still has the greatest impact on outcomes.

Exworthy and Halford (1999) suggest that there is a deep sense of alienation in the teaching profession alongside a paralleled loss of support from the Local Education Authority (LEA). They go on to chronicle the impact of the Education Reform Act 1988. For head teachers they conclude that this has necessitated changes, a shift, from community servant to '*salesperson*' of an '*educational commodity*' (1999:69). A shift in role which is also highlighted by others: McHugh (1995) suggested that the changes brought about by the Education Reform Act had been traumatic for head teachers who now find themselves as managers as opposed to master teachers. Narratives of participants in this study gave a strong sense of this shifting role and the impact on individuals and the role of head teacher in schools.

Other studies highlighted the correlation between coping style and potential stressors (Griffith, Steptoe, and Cropley, 1999). This is an interesting finding, suggesting that factors intrinsic to teaching may not be in themselves stressful but instead become stressful in conjunction with an individual's coping style. Travers and Cooper (1996) suggested that personality based characteristics could increase individuals susceptibility to high levels of stress. However, other than personality type and certain behavioral characteristics, they do not develop these ideas beyond a rather general cognitive perspective, ignoring the role of early experience in the formation of attitudes to work, resilience and stress. This may be indicative of a different theoretical perspective as to what underlies personality, highlighting a gap in this field of research, which perhaps this study could explore and provide some illumination.

Generally the studies I have outlined in this occupational field to date, although relevant, do not explore the personal and subjective meaning of occupational experience in depth. This is largely due to the understandable limitations of the survey method which has used largely self report studies. The understandable focus on stress of many studies has perhaps also obscured other emerging

narratives in this occupational field. There appears to be an absence of studies in this occupational area (and perhaps more generally in respect of senior professionals) that link culture, structure, and biography.

My interest and focus in this study has been different. I have been interested in capturing the 'internal' and 'subjective' dimensions of occupational experience of head teachers as leaders of schools. It was this that has led me to select a biographical interview method which is both intensive and in depth. There are advantages to this but also limitations. What I have discovered intensively appears to provide some correlation with findings of the more extensive studies highlighted above but it has also deepened my understanding of individual experience in organizational context which I will elaborate on in later chapters.

### **The Organization in the Mind**

In analysing and conceptualising the data one theoretical model stood out - the 'Organization-in-the-mind'. This is a theoretical perspective which offers understanding of individual narratives in an organizational frame but the true relevance only became apparent, and this in an unexpected sense, after some months of data analysis. I came to realise that the narratives had a meaning which stretched beyond the individual and conveyed, what I now understand to be, the organization-in-the-mind of participants (Armstrong, 2005).

This was a concept of which I was familiar: a consultative approach to individual role analysis pioneered by the Grubb Institute (Hutton, Bazalgette, and Reed, 1997) and, more recently by David Armstrong, (2005) of the Tavistock Consultancy Service. This way of thinking offered a framework for exploring management and leadership in organizations. It directs attention to how the organization is experienced by the role holder, considering the internal picture they present about the organization and how this picture, in their minds, relates to the organization as a whole.



Organizations exist as an external reality shaped by task, structure and design but alongside this formulation is the enterprise that is actually created. There is the organization that is intended, the organization that actually exists in reality, and the organization that exists in the minds of those who work within it. The interactions that occur within an institution may well differ from that which was designed. It is this second aspect, shaped by the human element or human behaviour at work that the concept of 'organization-in-the-mind' appears to throw light on.

*'Organization- in- the- Mind' is what the individual perceives in his or her own head of how activities and relations are organised, structured and connected internally. It is a model internal to oneself, part of one's own inner world, relying upon the inner experiences of my interactions, relations and the activities I engage in, which gives rise to images, emotions, values and responses in me, which may consequently be influencing my own management and leadership, positively or adversely ...'Organization -in-the Mind' helps me to look beyond the normative assessments of organizational issues and activity, to become alert to my inner experience and give richer meaning to what is happening to me and around me'. (Hutton, Bazalgette, & Reed, 1997:114)*

Hutton, Bazalgette, and Reed (1997) suggest that the connection between internal and external experience - how the individual engages with the realities of their organizational role - will lead to more uncomfortable aspects of their experience being avoided or suppressed. In turn, this experience has an effect even if 'forgotten'. These recollections of semi repressed memory, not immediately available but somehow still accessible, links to Christopher Bollas and the concept of the 'unthought known' (Bollas, 1987). These relate to aspects of our experience that are known but not thought about. When recollected they may appear obvious, but until the connection is made they are difficult somehow to locate or fully remember.

From this perspective the 'culture' that participants 'produced' or 'induced' through their narratives about the organization, and their responses within interview to me, as researcher provided evidence of the kind of organization they have in their mind. This may differ from the one that actually exists

as an external reality. Once the organization-in-the-mind is uncovered it can then be tested against the organization that actually exists.

*‘Organization- in-the-mind is about what is happening inside my own head – it is my reality – and has to be distinguished from any other reality ‘out there’. It is the idea of the organisation which, through experiencing and imagining, forms in my inner psychic space and which then influences how I interact with my environment.’* (Hutton, Bazalgette, & Reed, 1997:114)

In the citation quoted above, the organization-in-the-mind is described as an internal part or aspect of oneself; full of the ideas, wishes, fantasies and images the individual has about the organization, which in essence the individual projects onto and into the organization. Essentially, it is a model of the organization and a set of experiences related to this that is held in the mind. What became clear during this study was that individuals brought a variety of experiences to bear in their understanding of their work (from childhood, family, school, university, and previous work roles etc) which created a particular map in their minds.

This much was clear early on through the data but I came to see rather more than this – that it did not only convey the pathways participants had taken into teaching and headship, it also appeared to indicate or convey something of the current organization itself as it was experienced by them. These experiences generated sets of ideas about childhood, about school, about teaching and headship, which when placed together constructed the current working institution, the school in their minds.

The selection and the nature of the descriptions conveyed something of their own personal and ‘internal’ experience, but through the resonances it created, it appeared to communicate something more than this, something which was powerfully charged by their experience within their current organization. It was here, at this threshold, that David Armstrong’s (Armstrong, 2005) work delivered insight.

What Armstrong proposed is connected to the statement above but different: that the images and ideas of the individual about the organization is also a product of the interrelation between individual and context, that is, something intrinsically related to the socio-psychic field in which they

are born. Thus, the individual does not only project onto the organization they are also projected into by the organization.

Armstrong describes the emotional experience of the organization as a whole as a combination of the interrelation between task, structure, and context (or environment). Building strongly on Bion's (1968) work on groups, he suggests members contribute individually, and often anonymously, according to the structure of their personality to the organization they work within. But, and this is a key point, they are simultaneously contributed to developing an emotional resonance within themselves of the organization both at conscious and unconscious levels. These resonances are both determined and informed by the role the individual holds within the organizational structure and the boundary the role relates to within the organization as a whole.

In another paper '*Emotions in Organizations: disturbance or intelligence*', Armstrong (2004) again draws heavily from this perspective;

*'It views emotions as a function of the organization-in-context, rather than simply of the individual and his or her relationships, or of the group. Correspondingly, it is suggested, alertness to the emotional undertow of organizational life can be a powerful source of information for managers and leaders in enlarging understanding.'* (Armstrong, 2004)

Armstrong (2005) suggests that the organization-in-the-mind is not just to be understood metaphorically but literally as well – a construct of the conscious and unconscious aspects of the organizational world: the perceived task, aims, authority, power, accountability etc which are deeply connected to and rooted to the emotional resonances which are produced within the mind of the individual in response to the organization. It is on this basis that individuals can be brought into feeling, and indeed behaving, in certain ways by organizational dynamics in which they are both an active and constituent part.

This would suggest that emotional experience is not independent of the organizational structures in which they occur - but directly related to and affected by it.

*'[Organization-in-the-mind is] not the client's mental construct of the organization but, rather, the emotional reality of the organization that is registered in him or her, that is infecting him or her, that can be owned or disowned, displaced or projected, denied, scotomized - that can also be known but unthought.'* (Armstrong, 2005:52)

The organization-in-the-mind of participants did seem to be formed by their own individual experiences, their pathways, their formative experiences (parents, childhoods, their education and later professional mentors) as well as their professional trajectories through different organizational constellations. The framing of their narratives, given the context we met in, appeared to reflect the 'organizational mind', detailing something of the fabric or essence of the working environment they inhabited. This was created through the emotional resonances and memories that were produced within them to my initial question, and between the participant and me as researcher.

It was as if the organizational context as well as the individual had facilitated the choosing and selection of material at interview. From this perspective the participants' narratives appeared to take on new meaning. Armstrong states,

*'From this perspective, each individual's internal model or constructs, conscious or unconscious, might perhaps better be seen as a secondary formation, a particular, more or less idiosyncratic, response to a common, shared organizational dynamic.'* (2005: 5)

The organization-in-the-mind is multi layered and multi faceted; it is certainly the sum of individual experience but it also appears to equate with an individual's experience within organizations including the organization they now work in.

Jon Stokes (1994) also uses these ideas to understand organizational life, and this has direct significance when we will later consider participants' narratives collectively as an occupational group. Stokes points out that an individual may hold different aspects of the team and organization within themselves. These individual images may be in opposition but when linked, these fragments may reveal something of the whole,

*'..the idea of the institution that each individual carries in his or her own mind. Members from different parts of the same organization may have different parts of the same organization may have different pictures and these may be in contradiction to one another. Although often partly unconscious, these pictures nevertheless inform and influence behaviour and feelings of the members. An organisation is coherent to the extent that there is also a collective organization in the mind shared by all members.'* (Stokes, 1994: 121).

The very nature of the construction creates a distortion in the mind. The organizational 'reality' is filtered through an individual and collective 'mesh' and these converging forces are framed and charged by the emotional life of the organization. This vortex creates a powerful emotional undertow which causes drift: pulling individuals into patterns of behaviour not intended either by themselves or by organizational design (although it appears to be intrinsically connected to both). In relation to this research, the narratives appeared to provide evidence of this, current and historical experiences which had a dynamic effect on the way participants related to and took up their role within the organization they currently worked in.

The early remembered stories, while revealing how participants found their way to being a head teacher, also revealed something of how they felt about the role now. In this sense what they remembered and how they remembered told me something of the organization, at the point of interview. Their recounted experiences and memories, read through current organizational subjectivity, were deeply illuminating. It was the current role and context which called forth aspects of their personal experience which resonated with their current position. These are points I will come back to in later chapters.

### **The 'Tavistock' Model of Consultancy.**

In undertaking this research I needed to reflect on the relationship between my research question, my method of research and my practice as an organizational consultant. To achieve this I needed to clarify the principles and assumptions which underpin these and additionally to consider as a researcher what I needed to include within my frame of reference and relevance to undertake this

study. The concept of the organization-in-the-mind was a key point of reference for this study and one that is built on substantial theoretical pillars. I will consider these and their relevance to this area of professional research.

There are two major sources of literature that set out, through a series of case studies, the main tenets of this approach as applied to organizations; 'The Unconscious at Work' (Obholzer and Roberts, 1994) and 'Working Below the Surface' (Huffington, Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle and Pooley, 2004). These volumes provide almost a manifesto for this kind of consultancy approach, demonstrating the nature of the model and its evolution over the years. The articles within these publications show how unconscious dynamics in organizations influence relationships and performance. These kinds of studies have for example considered a number of different institutions including Intensive care Units (Speck, 1994), hospitals (Dartington, 1994), Residential Home for Adolescents (Cardona, 1994), Day Care services for the Elderly (Bolton and Roberts, 1994), and Psychiatric Hospitals (Roberts, 1994).

Moylan (Moylan, 1994) when considering institutional stress (in a drug dependency clinic), observes how staff in some sectors are constantly barraged by clients projections and how defences in such situations can be necessary to be able to cope, but also results in staff mirroring the defences of clients. Moylan describes this as a process of 'contagion' where the pain of reality is avoided through processes of splitting and projection. Others like Cohn (1994) writing in this genre approach stress in a similar manner, this time looking at a special care baby unit, suggesting that client's experiences become projected into the worker which in turn creates concordant responses and emotions which by their very nature are alien, distressing and stressful.

Case studies of organizations have been the main method of generating knowledge and developing associated practice within this tradition over the last 50 years. The natural extension of which is the Professional Doctorate program at the Tavistock including the Professional Doctorate in Organizational Consultancy I am currently engaged in. With the exception of Armstrong (2005) few

have used in depth individual accounts to explore the life of contemporary organizations and this study may provide a useful addition to this field of study because of this.

However, the main area of contribution this study can make will be to draw attention to the frequently complex, hidden and unconscious dimensions of organizational life in a particular kind of organization – in this case a school. My argument, drawing from previous literature and evidence provided by participants in this study is that without an understanding of these underlying dimensions the anxieties and distresses of head teachers and the systems they work in cannot be readily understood. Therefore systems psychodynamic literature encapsulated within, but not exclusive to, these two volumes of work provides a substantial part of the theoretical approach I will both adopt and make a contribution to in this study.

The Tavistock approach to consultancy is built on solid foundations, the theoretical roots of which go back to Melanie Klein (1929, 1946) who identifies through her work with children two psychological positions; the *paranoid schizoid* and *depressive position*<sup>1</sup>. It is from Klein's work that the concept of defences against anxiety originates. Within participants' narratives in this study there are substantial accounts, some of them extreme, of individuals managing considerable anxiety which appears to produce regression to behaviors and defensive strategies that were identified by Klein.

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<sup>1</sup> The *paranoid schizoid position* – which can be present throughout life – is categorized by defenses against pain and anxiety such as splitting and projection. These are defensive mechanisms against anxiety where aspects of self – perceived as bad – are rejected or pushed (projected) out into others.

The *depressive position* is a more mature psychological position where previously separated feelings such as love and hate can be held or 'contained' in a more integrated form, at times we may need others to support this process. However, the maintenance of the *depressive position* is not permanent (there is an oscillation between both states of mind) and manifests frequently in painful and contradictory feelings which results in a need for reparation – a desire to repair perceived damage – the result of earlier (frequently previously disowned) feelings of hate and aggression. Reparation was a powerful source for occupational motivation apparent across a number of participants' interviews.

Much of our contemporary understanding of counter transference<sup>2</sup> owes much to Klein's (1946) concept of projective identification. This is an unconscious process where parts of self are psychically split off and projected into an object (frequently another person) that in some ways becomes identified with these qualities or parts. Klein suggested that projective identification is used throughout life and that sometimes it is the only way an adult can communicate experience from within their psyches. As a researcher the emotional state evoked within me during interview (noted within field notes) also gave a sense of something being communicated at a deeper level within the research sessions. Projective identification forms the basis of psycho dynamically informed research methods (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009, Hollway and Jefferson, 2000) as I will consider in later chapters.

There will be a number of accounts within this study of anxiety and considerable stress but I will argue that the relevance goes beyond the individual. Klein did not make the extension to group behaviour this would be done later in contributions by Elliot Jaques (1955) and Isabel Menzies-Lyth (1997). Jaques (1955) introduced the concept of social defence systems in organizations. He suggested that individual members can use organizations to defend against their own unconscious anxieties which in turn distort ways of working particularly when the task itself was a source of anxiety.

Jacques identified how individuals in groups could unconsciously create '*social defences*', which enabled members to avoid painful conflicts while simultaneously provided serious obstacles to an organizations ability to function. The defences, identified by Klein, such as denial and splitting can manifest themselves in organizational life as avoidance and selective blindness.

Isabel Menzies-Lyth (1997) developed these ideas in her work on institutional defences against anxiety. Menzies-Lyth considered the reasons for a high drop-out rate after nurse training (education also has a high drop our rate following qualification) and was another example of the

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<sup>2</sup> Counter Transference: The feelings invoked by the patient in the analyst a concept identified by Freud and clarified by later writers (Racker, 1968) as how analysts gain an unconscious awareness of their clients before an intellectual understanding is available frequently of displaced earlier relationships into the present.



Tavistock model applied to an institution, this time a hospital. Essentially what Menzies-Lyth demonstrated through her observations of nursing staff - somewhat turning Jacques ideas on their head - was that the institutions themselves raise unconscious defences against anxiety related to the task which then become manifest in work practices which has powerful influence on work culture.

Apparent within this study of head teachers is that individual defensive structures presented during interview i.e. working harder and harder to avoid anxieties associated with failure or fear of failure, could also be understood simultaneously as institutional defences at play- a collective defensive formation operating within the school environment.

Central to this model is the belief that, within the helping professions (like education), the lack of emotional containment in a system creates greater individual and organizational stress, distorting the primary task of the organization through increased reliance on institutional defences.

The concept of containment comes from the psychoanalytic work of Bion (1967) who focusing on the mother child relationship suggested that the mother contains and makes sense of the baby's emotional states which in turn makes them more bearable to the child. This model of organizational consultancy is related to the containment and management of anxiety in institutions. These anxieties, if not contained, can produce powerful and primitive emotions which although frequently unconscious still have a powerful impact on organizational culture and workers within. This has a bearing at every level on primary schools because the nature of relationships and the containment offered has an impact on the quality of school life for everyone – children, parents, support staff, teachers - not just the head teacher. However, it does not appear to be accounted for within organizational design.

Primary school is one of the first institutions children meet after leaving family. It is a major point of transition and socialisation. Miller (1999) makes the point that schools provide a larger holding environment and the first experience of containment outside of family for many children: an *'encompassing mother substitute'* (1999:103), who contains the shared projections of pupils, and

gives individuals a sense of safety and of wholeness, where their '*contradictions and multiple identities*' (1999:103) are contained. It is an important observation, deeply suggestive of the strains and expectations that are placed on schools.

The psychoanalytically informed consultant is not only trying to trace and understand the defensive and projective processes at play within the organization they are also trying to contain or hold the feelings until there is sufficient capacities in the group to 're own' some of their experience. This supports the maturational process of the organization bringing greater integration and an increased capacity to manage and tolerate complexity and the varying emotional states associated. This shift to 'depressive position' (Klein, 1946) functioning allows a more collective work experience to emerge promoting better communication and effective joint working while lessening defensive strategies.

The position I adopted at interview, as a researcher was to provide containment for participants' experiences to be heard and listened to. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) suggest that '*recognition and containment*' (2000:49) of the intersubjective aspects of experience supports trust to develop in the research encounter. My sense from some participants was that this may have been the first time they had been able to speak authentically about their experiences of headship because they did not feel sufficiently contained or have alternative avenues for expression within their current working environment.

These key concepts outlined above have considerable relevance to this study where, as I will demonstrate later, the emotional experience of the work which is frequently disturbing impacts on both individual experience and organizational effectiveness.

My argument within this study will be that if these unconscious dimensions or the anxieties and concerns of head teachers are not sufficiently understood then one misses much that is important. A multi dimensional approach supports something being done - not just by understanding but also by addressing stressful situations, or organizational dysfunction - be that counseling, consultancy, or

peer support. This approach provides not only a model of understanding but an avenue for repair and remedy.

The other major contributors I will draw on and which are relevant to this study are Wilfred Bion (1968) and Kurt Lewin (1936). Bion drawing from Kleinian ideas of infantile defence mechanisms takes psychoanalysis into the group context and in so doing develops a theory that would have considerable impact in the way groups and organizations can be understood.

In this model for approaching and understanding groups, an individual's personal unconscious is seen as playing a subsidiary role largely overshadowed by group or institutional dynamics in which they are a part and in which they may hold, through a process of projective identification, states of mind for the system as a whole. I perceived narratives, not as isolated personal accounts but rather more than this. Recognizing them as part of the group context in which the individual works providing deeper insight and greater meaning about the environments their professional lives were lived in.

Bion (1968) considered that a collective need to belong produces a culture or attitude in the group in which each member can share. This methodology, unifying both psychic and social fields, viewed behaviour in groups as powerfully, if not exclusively, driven by emotional experience alongside which defences are raised to manage anxiety. The relevance to this study is the understanding it affords individual positioning within group and institutional fields demonstrating the forces individuals were subjected to within the course of their work in schools.

Bion termed the group's capacity to work on the primary task 'work group' mentality a second (and often unconscious) tendency to avoid the primary task he named 'basic assumption'<sup>3</sup> mentality.

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<sup>3</sup> Fundamentally underpinning basic assumption behaviour are two drives or survival instincts, pleasure seeking and pain avoidance. Dependency is expressed through the baby clinging to mother (or attachment type behaviours). Fight/Flight is also felt towards the breast/mother when hunger or discomfort is felt and experienced as life threatening. In the infant, the changes between the two positions

Bion suggested that much of the bizarre or irrational behaviour we witness in groups arises from the formulation of the basic group. He proposes three primitive phantasies groups can operate under; dependency, fight/flight, and pairing. He describes them as basic assumptions to define how primitive, and fundamental they are. In using the term basic assumption, Bion suggests that the groups are operating in a particular mode 'as if' all members are holding a basic assumption in common.

Bion used these terms – the work group and basic assumptions - to capture the two aspects of mental activity which he felt were identifiable within all aspects of group life. These two modes of mental functioning are always in interplay and are intrinsic to our mental life and to our lives in groups. They refer to both mental activity and also proto – mental activity that is life on the borderline between somatic and psychic life, where thoughts are not fully formed or understood.

The expression of group processes through the 'basic group' will be indicating something, perhaps unformulated in the 'work group' or within the intrinsic nature of the work of the group, and the conflicts and associations these create in the inner and largely unconscious world of the group. Where the stated organizational task is felt to be anxiety producing the group can regress to primitive models of functioning. A number of schools within this study appeared to be under considerable pressure and it was evident that this was impacting on relationships and the expectations and pressures on the leadership function.

Others (Miller, 1993) have widened these group perspectives applying them to society as a whole with some effect. Understanding shifts in wider societal dynamics specifically a shift from dependency to failed dependency (Miller, 1993) provides a further optic to understand the role of schools in society and how shifting societal templates impact on the unconscious foundations of work in schools. This is particularly relevant to schools where a withdrawal by government from

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are often instantaneous. The third drive, for reproduction and the survival of the species, is found in pairing. In this sense, each of the basic assumptions can be linked to Freud's oral, anal, and phallic phases of early development.

more traditional areas of need in society has placed pressure on schools to provide for these dependency needs for the communities they serve.

Bion (1968) called the individual capacity for groupishness 'valency' – a term he borrowed from physicists – it describes the intrinsic capacity for particles to combine with each other. Each individual has their own valency and each group and institution its own characteristic anxieties, which Bion (1968) understood through 'basic assumption' phenomena. Valency keys individuals into the group and, in groups dominated by anxiety; individuals show greater readiness to enter into the behaviours of the group.

This represents a key theoretical model of understanding as to the personal characteristics, fit or valency for role and the kinds of unconscious forces that participants were exposed to within institutional and group process. This is a critical component of this theory throwing light on how groups can use individuals, and how the forces around groups can pull individuals into acting, feeling and behaving in certain ways.

What became apparent was that early experiences appeared to provide a psychological fit with the roles later selected in education. This indeed appeared to lead some to take up their roles and to maintain them. For example the less than good enough position that some had indentified for themselves early in life, because of earlier struggles and failings, had led them to indentify teaching as a mid stream professional route rather than what were perceived as higher status professions – the law and medicine for instance. The ideas and expectations participants had about leadership and about relationships and 'success' would influence how they would position themselves and in turn how the group or organization would use them. As the institution changed this 'fit', for some at least, was stretched, in some cases making it harder to sustain personal connections with the work which in turn created significant tensions for the individual concerned.

What became clear is that the underlying basic assumptions – societal and organizational - which underpinned the work in schools were shifting. This was leaving some head teachers struggling and working outside their natural valencies. Others - having started their careers at a different time-

appeared to have an easier 'fit' with the underlying institutional requirements and therefore appeared better matched, and more able to excel in the current climate.

Primary schools by nature manage the dependency needs of very young children and therefore one would expect a valency for dependency. However, although this appeared to be historically apparent what became clear during this study was that newer head teachers appeared to be more business minded and entrepreneurial, more 'fight/flight', in outlook leaving more dependency aspects of the task to be maintained by teaching or support staff. This fitted well with new organizational expectations, as I will describe later, but others - generally more experienced head teachers - struggled to make the necessary internal adaptations.

When considering change in organizations the work of Kurt Lewin (1936) has considerable relevance. Lewin drew attention to the 'Gestalt' properties of human systems and was perhaps the first to develop a 'topological' representation of psychological and social systems which would later open up avenues of enquiry for alternative organizational design. Groups, he suggested, are not the sum total of their component parts (molecules are not the same thing as the structures they form).

In 'Frontiers in Group dynamics' (1947) Lewin takes these ideas further with two important developments. Firstly, he suggested that when trying to change a system, forces are created for and against change. From this he developed the idea of force fields or force field analysis to explain the frequently conflicting forces that are held in tension when organizations or systems are changing. Linked to this and secondly, in this paper, and a later paper (1950) he suggests that systems have a tendency to move to a state of what he termed 'quasi stationary equilibrium.'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1950), a biologist, writing at a similar time as Lewin and applying concepts from biology and physics describes what he terms as open systems: *'Living systems are open systems, maintaining themselves in exchange for materials with environment, and in continuous building up and breaking down of their components.'* (1950:23). Bertalanffy describes open systems as tending towards steady states whereas closed systems maintained equilibrium albeit briefly and at cost –he suggests that equilibrium is *'a sign of death'* (1950:27).

These ideas would later prove to be particularly relevant to this study given the description of significant change in the narratives of participants' and the various societal and institutional 'force fields' they travelled through which in turn became embedded in their practice and work philosophy later exerting considerable gravitational 'pull' in their careers as they passed through processes of institutional change in schools.

Lewin's significance to this model of approach goes further and should not be underestimated. Miller (1997) would later say that Lewin was the founder of action research which the Tavistock Institute would adopt as the key method of working combining ongoing social and psychological research with professional practice.

### **Tavistock Model of Consultancy related to Education and Stress**

The BBC 2 series, 'The Talking Cure', which featured Anton Obholzer's (Obholzer, 2002) consultancy to a head teacher (which I mentioned in earlier sections), was of direct relevance to this study. The short film gives a powerful presentation of this model of consultancy in action and gives insight into some of the underlying and complex dynamics that exist in schools.

Anna Freud (Freud, 1952) comments that schools were increasingly expected to fulfill functions that were formerly seen as belonging to the home. This, she acknowledged, had increased the parameters of teacher's roles to include emotional and social development as well as educational growth. She suggests that this has been accompanied with a belief that teachers are seen increasingly as a '*mother substitute*' for young children.

Freud warns of three dangers for teaching staff; the loss of adult values and an over identification with the world of children; losing sight of early developmental phases as preparation for later stages of childhood and adulthood; and, finally, for teaching staff to start to see the children they are teaching as their own, thereby losing sight of role and what is more, creating rivalry with parents. These three points struck me, as being relevant to the close identifications between participants'

and children I observed which in turn impacted on relationships with children, parents and authority figures. It also highlighted the underlying role of teacher for the communities they serve and the potential dynamics and tensions that can be in existence. These were evident in the participants' narratives but also in the texture of the environment during visits. I would frequently witness tensions at the boundary between schools and the community during visits to schools - including a furious argument in a school reception area between a parent and a succession of teachers - about whether her daughter had eaten a sausage. Issues of trust, jurisdiction, and culture were prominent.

Linking to this point Emilia Dowling and Elsie Osborne's (1985) work provides insights into schools consultancy from a systems theory perspective. The text outlines the overlapping spheres of family and school life and the impact this has on children, parents and teachers alike.

More general research studies at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (Lawrence, 1981) considered work place stress in an increasingly industrial society. It considered the impact of a more fluid notion of work and employment and the likely impact on the underlying psychological aspects of work, particularly highlighting the theme of 'dehumanisation' when workers are faced with a more technical, more bureaucratic society. Interestingly, it draws from the biological and physiological arena as well as psychological, linking physical ill health with stress thus pointing to a reduction in the functioning of the immune system and the buildup of toxins caused by psychological dysfunction. It is an interesting, relevant, and comprehensive study, applying systems psychodynamic theory to a program of research into stress in the work place.

Stokes (1994) previously had written in a similar vein, suggesting that change and uncertainty about the future in the modern organization can cause stress for individuals. Changes in organizations can create confusion about the primary task or mission, which in turn, can also create tensions for individuals. The structural shifts that have occurred within the supporting fabric of schools have in



no small part transformed the nature of relationships with wider hierarchies while reconfiguring the task and the understanding of role that head teachers drew from this.

Bridger (1976) points to the changing and turbulent nature of work in causing stress, the critical characteristics of which are accelerating technological developments and information overload. Bridger's is a very interesting, and I think highly relevant paper which is pertinent. His work draws heavily on the ideas postulated by Winnicott (1971) and John Bowlby (1969), related to attachment and transitional objects. He describes the use of various objects in the developmental sequence, from playing with soft toys to games and then activities in adulthood and occupational realms.

Bridger suggests that an individual's capacity to withstand stress is developed through these phases. He suggests that development through childhood, adolescence and young adulthood is accompanied by the development of the capacity to withstand stress internally and externally and physically, as well as mentally. Individuals develop through managing a succession of boundaries; womb, mother, family, school, and so on. In this process, a series of developmental 'platforms' (or internal maps) are established from which individuals can go on and manage more challenging and potentially more 'stressful' situations.

These factors, which are highly significant to this study, are fundamental he suggests in later choice of career, approaches to leadership and perceptions of stress. Bridger concludes by advising that any use of technique and theory to understand the conditions that give rise to inappropriate levels of stress in organizations should be focused at the internal and external forces that effect relationships, roles, and institutions in their various contexts.

## Chapter 4

### Research Questions.

Through the initial review of literature and my own experiences of consulting certain sets of thoughts began to develop. This in turn became clustered around particular sets of questions which I found myself returning to, questions which I struggled to answer using the available literature or which appeared to have been overlooked in previous studies.

The overarching research question remained the same:

***‘An investigation of the stresses, pressures and challenges faced by Primary School Head Teachers in a context of organisational change in Schools’.***

It was now accompanied with a series of six sub questions;

- How have head teachers negotiated the tension between their role and their experience of society?
- What are the kinds of psycho social patterns which help us to understand how personal and professional biographies converge in leadership roles?
- What are the types of strategies head teachers have deployed in relation to leadership, organisational change and stress?
- What are the kinds of psycho social patterns which intersect in head teachers’ understanding and experience of stress?
- Does limited institutional experience confer greater vulnerability on head teachers in their role as leaders in schools?
- How have head teachers negotiated tensions between their professional role and that of the governing body and the local authority in schools?

As I proceeded with the research, other questions and thoughts materialised. I think this in itself was an important part of the process. The temptation to plough ahead, forging material to fit with my initial framework was great, but somehow these new questions were part of the journey, part of the

material as it arose from research interviews and the frequently long train journeys back home. The danger, as I saw it then, was that if I kept to the 'script' I may lose something, or not let something in that needed to be thought about.

- Why did participants become teachers and head teachers?
- What kind of profession is teaching and what 'kinds' of people does it attract and has this been affected by changes in education?
- What kind of management discourse did participants identify with and what were the differences between participants?
- Did participants feel sufficiently esteemed and authorised to do the job and where does this come from?
- What led to the career choice of teaching?
- How and when did the ambition to be a deputy head teacher or head teacher emerge?
- Does the participant manage their role well?
- Are the participants likely to continue in role?
- Do they feel they have been successful?
- What factors support them in role and what factors obstruct?
- What have been the effects of reforms in the education system in relation to institutional expectations?

Of course, there could have been many more. These were the ones which kept my attention, kept reoccurring in my own thoughts; I sensed that they were linked somehow to my own experience of the interviews and the narratives within – even if I did not feel afforded an answer during the process. The literature review had not thrown up anything substantial in these areas – seeing them perhaps as background noise to the more eye catching, and frequently aired, figures on workload, 'stress' and 'breakdown'. For me, at some point, this background became fundamental to understanding the tensions experienced by some on the surface of the profession.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Methodological Issues**

Having identified the questions I wanted to consider, the research methodology did not naturally follow as I had hoped, at least not at the time. I considered many different approaches. Previous research in relation to education, as I have already stated, appeared to have used largely self report surveys and/or questionnaires to explore the effects of change and teachers experience of stress. It is clear from these that teaching is a stressful profession. Many of these were quantitative studies. Approaches that had lent themselves to a wide analysis of the extent of the difficulties across the occupational field but, I felt, did not provide me with an effective method to answer the questions I had set myself within this study. Neither did these methodologies address the key underlying interest in the internal and external dimensions of headship which I had, as I outlined in earlier chapters, become curious about. Questions which I felt had not been addressed by previous research, were unlikely to be illuminated by choosing the same methodological approach. I would have to look elsewhere – a Qualitative approach and one suited to psycho social research.

I was interested in head teacher's experience, but in particular in its deeper emotional and biographical aspects and their relation to the changing situation of schools and their governance. The interest in these inner dimensions, not only came from what I perceived as a gap in the literature but also arose from my training and work as a consultant, where questions of anxiety and inner conflict are often very significant in bringing consultants into organizations or making their work valuable. This is the academic field in which this particular Doctorate firmly sits with an emphasis from psychodynamic or psychoanalytic perspective. This approach or line of inquiry makes an intensive study, rather than an extensive one appropriate.

My aims were plainly different from those pursued in most of the educational literature I have reported on. I was not so much interested in average patterns, or in cause and effect relations, as in the meanings of experiences for individuals. Studied in depth, I hoped to exemplify some common patterns of experience in the field, even though the research method selected was not going to establish how widely shared these patterns are. An intensive method would be better adapted to the context of discovery than the context of verification.

I considered various kinds of interview method, with open-ended semi-structured interviews as one option, but decided that this would not give me enough scope to explore the implicit and not fully articulated states of mind and feeling that I had become interested in. Most relevant was the psycho-social body of methodological writing that has been developed to explore implicit and unconscious states of mind; Hollway and Jefferson (2000) and Clarke and Hoggett (2009). This was also connected to the Tavistock tradition's concerns with the relations between internal and external reality.

### **Sample selection and data gathering.**

Having decided I would be using intensive research methods I identified a small sample; six in total. There are gaps, as you would expect in a sample of this size. For instance, there was no participant from a Special Needs, Residential, Independent or Private school. There was also no participant from a school judged by OFSTED to be in 'special measures' or any deemed to be in an 'outstanding' category.

None of the participants' were known to me prior to interview and I have had no contact with any since. Largely, the sourcing of the sample was achieved through the suggestions made by consultants, or managers, who were also working in Education.

It emerged that one significant point of difference was the temporal points of entry to and exit from the Education system. Some had entered prior to the Education Reform Act, others afterwards; one was a 'fast track' head teacher, others had formerly been special advisors, some had worked themselves up entirely through the school system. Ages of respondents varied from early thirties to

late fifties, and there were two men and four women. Geographically varied the constituents of the sample came from different and diverse areas around the country – the details of which have been disguised to protect anonymity.

Seven head teachers were approached in total; only one – who initially accepted – refused to participate, giving pressure of work as the reason. Six, in research of this type was an adequate number. Some interviews took place within the participants' homes, others within school, and one elected to meet me at my office.

The method evolved as the research proceeded into a hybrid: The Biographic-Narrative-Interpretative-Method (BNIM) and the Grounded Theory Methodology, I will show how this combined methodology evolved through the course of this study.

### **Biographical Interviewing.**

I required a method that allowed me to access participants' frame of relevance including information that maybe hidden, or defended, or not even obvious to the participant themselves. The fundamental proposition in psychoanalytic theory that anxiety is inherent in the human condition requiring frequently unconscious defences also suggested an approach that could manage or give insight into under the surface material (Huffington, Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle, L., Pooley, 2004).

There have been a number of developments in psycho – social approaches to research in the last decade (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). The interplay between individual's inner and outer worlds - viewed as being more significant in recent years – has formed into the discipline we now recognize as psycho-social studies whose growing contributions are explored in Simon Clarke and Paul Hoggett's book (2009). They suggest that, in part, this expansion has been created by dissatisfaction with other qualitative methods which stay at a more discursive level viewing interview respondents as rational and fully aware actors without unconscious defenses which would inhibit their capacity to engage with the researcher. A key element of psycho social research is that anxiety is inherent in the research encounter not only for the participant but also for the researcher - potentially giving rise to defensiveness in both!

I became interested in a biographical approach to research. It is a form of research that relies on the interviewer keeping their intervention to a minimum and relies on a narrative being elicited from the participant (Wengraf, 2001). Within psycho-social approaches to research there have been two major contributors to the method of biographical interviewing; Hollway and Jefferson (2000, 2009) and Wengraf (2001). Hollway and Jefferson developed the “free association narrative interview” (FANI) using an open framework of questioning to access the participants frame of meaning. They suggest commonality with the method of storytelling and the psychoanalytic method of free association.

*‘The particular story told, the manner and detail of telling, the points emphasized, the morals drawn, all represent choices made by the story-teller. Such choices are revealing, often more so than the teller suspects.’* (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000: 35)

They suggest that by eliciting a narrative structure from participants it is possible to engage with levels of concerns which go far beyond day to day awareness, accessing a frame of understanding which is probably not visible using a more traditional method. They explicitly draw from Melanie Klein’s theories of psychoanalysis in relation to defences against anxiety suggesting that conflicts in the psyche impact on the positioning of subjects and the discourses they invest in.

*‘the kind of narrative that is not structured according to conscious logic, but according to unconscious logic, that is, the associations following pathways defined by emotional motivations rather than rational intentions.’* (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000:37).

Wengraf and Chamberlayne (2006) through the biographic-narrative-interpretative-method (BNIM) have made the other major contribution in this area concentrating on biographic method of inquiry and the application to social policy and professional practice.

*‘BNIM is particularly suited to explore the experienced interaction between individual subjectivities and purposes, on the one hand, and, on the other... It does so in a form of practice-near research that*

*practitioners and other managers of and researchers in practice can both engage with and engage in'. (Wengraf 2001:19)*

As a methodology for tracking psycho social biographies BNIM appeared an obvious choice. I perceived a gap within current literature in relation to this occupational group which did not consider the biographical dimensions of those occupying the role and the impact of this on their leadership experience. I wanted to explore what happens to individual head teachers throughout their careers in schools and also what is happening to the organizational system in which they are working also over time. This essentially was the ontology I wanted to study. BNIM is well adapted to studies of this nature since individuals report what happens to them over time.

I was not only interested in the conscious or known pathways and explanations. More specifically I was interested in the not so obvious dimensions of role, including the more hidden aspects of motivation – the unconscious aspects of career choice and occupational orientation. The advantage of a narrative approach, according to Wengraf (2001), is that it,

*'[C]onveys tacit and unconscious assumptions and norms of the individual or of a cultural group.'*  
(2001: 115).

BNIM is a method which allows access to material which may not be obvious even to participants themselves, information that could perhaps run counter to current or more obvious narratives or explanations.

*'BNIM, through its focus on eliciting narratives of past experience rather than (just) explicit statements of present (or remembered) 'position', facilitates the expression and detection of perspectives and counter-narratives at various moments in the past...Consequently, BNIM is particularly suited for retrospective and ongoing longitudinal process studies of complexity, since it asks for accounts of earlier and ongoing experiences and particular incident narratives (PINS).*  
(Wengraf 2001:19)

Before considering BNIM in more detail – and the modifications I would later make - it is important to consider the history of this methodology and how it came into being. The early roots of BNIM are



found in Schutz (1992) and Rosenthal and Bar's work (Rosenthal and Bar, 1992), German sociologists who, after the war, produced accounts of holocaust survivors and Nazi soldiers. Because of this they were concerned with gaining information from subjects who might be too 'defended' to respond to direct questions about themselves. The guiding principle is that there is a gestalt to an individual's narrative, a whole which is more than the parts, which can provide an order or hidden agenda which has informed an individual's life.

While I did not consider head teachers to be quite as defended as Schutz and Rosenthal's participants I did regard them potentially as defended given their senior role in education, the level of scrutiny schools are exposed to and the potential difficulties in talking about feelings which individuals could feel bad about such as vulnerability or stress.

On balance, BNIM appeared to be the methodology that best fitted the questions I had identified. I attended the BNIM intensive training workshop (with Tom Wengraf and Pru Chamberlayne) which I found invaluable, and although I had some reservations initially, within that week, I became confident that I had found a method which, with some adjustment, would support me in exploring the questions I had developed.

The reason for this adjustment is important to consider. I did not, following the interviews, continue with the full BNIM method of analysis. The reason for this is that BNIM by its nature is complicated and intensive. I did **not** consider the participants in this study – namely head teachers – to be quite as defended to warrant or require such a penetrative or complex model of analysis. Indeed in the later stages the complex analysis appeared to distract from the material itself which although frequently 'hidden' was in my view accessible. Over six interviews I was concerned that I would be in danger of losing material which if I distributed my time more evenly could be made available. In short I did not feel it necessary to follow the full BNIM model for all participants and instead used it for two.

The methodology I have adopted therefore is essentially a hybrid: it combines BNIM and Grounded Theory. I will explore each in turn and in more detail.

BNIM is a model which explores peoples' lived experiences through biographical narrative interviews: essentially, this means in practice that open narrative questions are asked of participants, who are thereby encouraged to talk freely about their lives. In this approach participants define their own frame of relevance. Rather than being asked to respond to an imposed framework of questions, participants have the freedom to follow their own thought processes, their own associations to the initial question without restriction.

BNIM is a socio-biographical approach. It is both concerned with the biographical (concerned with individuals) and the sociological (concerned with society). One of the tasks was to establish and develop these links, placing individual narratives against a broader societal map, exploring in what ways individual experiences may be typical of the wider social experience of this professional group. The aim of my investigation is to make visible the experience of each research participant in his or her role as leader in a primary school and then to place this, alongside other participants' stories, within a broader societal map. This positioning seeks to make sense of individual pathways and trajectories in both the organizational and social contexts in which they evolved.

The tracking of personal perspectives and perceived values, through eliciting narratives of personal experience, can also allow the subjective dimensions of a respondent's experience to be explored (Wengraf, 2001, Chamberlayne, Rustin, and Wengraf, 2002). I felt at the time that this was critical. I wanted to understand, not just if people struggled in role, but how they made sense of it for themselves and what other internal dimensions or biographical experiences were informing their current professional experience.

This approach linked well with the systems psychodynamic perspective. BNIM is an approach that both allows for the 'psycho' and the 'societal' to be represented without either being privileged or neglected (Wengraf and Chamberlayne, 2006). It is also a method which allows for consideration of issues which may appear to have been avoided, or which indeed become visible and relevant through their very omission from a narrative.

In many ways, BNIM is well placed to explore the subjective experience of individuals, in role within an organizational setting; however the jump from individual narrative to organizational understanding is not without problems. The issue of how an individual case could illuminate wider social and organizational structures and processes is also supported by the BNIM method because, as I have stated earlier, it supports an understanding of an individual, in this case a head teacher, over time and therefore it is well placed to explore individuals' experience of (organizational) change over a period of years. The transferability of a method designed to explore individual life experiences to the analysis of organizations requires a shift of inference which is not easily made.

*"Our problem as researchers is to clarify how the social contexts which frame our subjects' life-histories are constituted, what are their most causally significant features, and in what ways are they typical of an historical moment or of a distinctive social space"* (Rustin, 1998: 113)

This, the causality between parts and whole, between micro and macro, and individual and wider social structure is addressed at length by Wengraf (2001) who suggests a continual and constant method of comparison.

BNIM necessarily sacrifices breadth or scope of application for the heuristic benefits of greater depth of understanding. The relatively limited number of individuals participating, and the fact that the research sample is not in any way controlled will restrict the degree this study can be generalised and therefore will also have an impact on the reliability. Not an uncommon circumstance for research of this type - intensive qualitative studies never support an extensive enough sample for statistical generalisation. Rustin's paper (1998) 'From individual life histories to sociological understanding' is suggestive of how a life-history approach can contribute to sociological understanding but also highlights some of the difficulties faced.

*'We are concerned to investigate the meanings of social exclusion for typical subjects in specified typical contexts of social structure. We are interested in the individual lives of our subjects, but especially in as much as we can identify their socially-typical features..... Perhaps*

*our key methodological problem is how to identify in individual life-stories those features which are representative or typical of their societal context.'* (Rustin, 1998: 112).

Thomas Scheff (Scheff, 1997) demonstrates how 'small parts' can be related to the 'largest wholes', and illustrates how individual narratives evoke wider organizational and societal structures and cultures. Sometimes these references are explicit and sometimes they are not, constituting instead a back drop, the social and societal wallpaper which form the context in which an individual's life story emerges as it meets organizational and societal interface. Through close observation, Scheff demonstrates how the use of words, gestures and emotions can, in extraordinarily subtle ways, throw light on both an individual's inner and outer life. He suggests this can bring us far closer to individual human reality and, at the same time, illuminate the society in which it is being or has been lived. Overall there is a convincing case for small and highly intensive studies.

### **The use of BNIM in the research project.**

The choice of BNIM provided clarity about the use of and structure of interviews for data collection: all six interviews were conducted using BNIM procedures. Interviews were divided into two sessions. At first, a carefully constructed question was asked, or SQUIN (Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative) for short.

*'As you know I am researching experiences of primary school head teachers so can you tell me the story of your life from where you first thought you would be a head teacher and how it has all developed for you up to now - all the events and experiences that have been important for you personally? I will listen first. I won't interrupt. I will just take some notes in case I have any questions for you when we have finished. Take as much time as you need and start wherever you like.'*

This question is aimed at inducing a single narrative and places the decision about the 'importance' of selected material on the participant, thus seeking to reduce the influence of the interviewer. It also gives permission for participants to speak in an open ended manner without the pressure of the interviewer obstructing or deflecting them with further questions. However, as Hollway and Jefferson (2000) point out it is not an easy stance to take and yet, in terms of psychoanalytic understanding and BNIM technique, it is imperative to allow the structure of the interview to arise from the participant themselves. This '*free-formed improvising*' (Wengraf 2001:27) by the participant allows access to a different level of insight through the structuring, however apparently random, of the narrative.

The second session is aimed at expanding the narrative of participants. Drawing from information provided at stage one by asking narrative based questions, and these strictly in the sequence of topics and words used by participants, it encourages elaboration on the descriptions provided in the first session while maintaining the individual gestalt or internal logic of sequence presented at the first stage of interview.

A story of a life can be seen as an overall narrative intersected with particular references which can be expanded during the second session. Whereas the first session usually provides a rather overarching report of experience, the second session through careful questioning allows for, and is aimed at, more detailed 'particular incident narratives' (PINS) emerging.

The decision to draw out particular aspects of a frequently long narrative at stage one lies with the interviewer. Essentially key points of salience are sought with BNIM guidelines supporting the selection: 1) Always start with the first or opening comments of the interview, 2) select any aspect or reference that feels emotionally charged, 3) any comment that is directly related to your area of research, 4) any comment that is apparently completely irrelevant, and 5) include any final or closing comments. A note about point four: the reason for points of irrelevance to be followed up is that inclusion suggests relevance, conscious or otherwise.

The process is mechanical. Indeed, there is little dialogue with the participant themselves throughout the process. The aim of questions is to induce narrative and the subjective experience of participants, not to enter into a dialogic relationship with them. To this end only narrative pointed questions are asked e.g. 'you said ..... in the first interview I wonder if you could tell me how all that happened?.' There are no pre-fashioned boxes for answers to be fitted into. Questions are, within this methodology, aimed at inducing a narrative within a frame which is indicated or alluded to by the participant themselves. However this is not straightforward. The questions asked would have given some indication of my interests as a researcher and therefore would in some ways have influenced or shaped responses and attitudes (transference) to me. And the framing of answers, again do not occur in a vacuum, they too involve the concept of a listener which will again be influenced by the perceptions of the researcher by the researched during the interview.

After all interviews I debriefed participants to check that they were not left with issues or feelings that were distressing. I also debriefed myself: writing immediately afterwards any thoughts feelings, images or ideas that had come into my mind during or after the interview as a method of recalling the impact of the material recalled at interview on me as interviewer. These notes included observations about their presentation and behaviour and my impressions of the environment I met them in. This would later provide useful data, and meant that observation also played a part in the interview process.

All interviews were recorded and later transcribed. This allowed me to give the participants absolute attention and to track key points which could be elaborated on at stage two. In length, interviews lasted from one to three and a half hours.

### **Data Analysis**

A verbatim transcript is made of the interview and then processed initially, according to BNIM procedures, in two different ways which allows the data to be considered along two distinct tracks: the 'lived life' and the 'told story' (Wengraf and Chamberlayne, 2006). An example is provided in Appendix B.

These two strands equate in part with the objective (lived life) and subjective (told story) accounts of an individual's experience. The method here allows the two key (and default) questions of BNIM to be considered;

*'Why did someone who lived their life like this decide to tell their story like that?'*

*'What is the meta pattern X that makes sense both of the living-of-the-lived-life pattern A and the telling-of-the-told-story-pattern Z?'* (Wengraf 2001:33).

BNIM then requires the researcher to go through the material future blind (i.e. avoiding as far as possible awareness of its development over time) like the participant did. The reason for this Wengraf (2001) suggests is that it avoids the biographic inevitability illusion and the numbing sense that a given life could only be lived one way and theorised and understood in only one way. In this way BNIM avoids some of the pre-determinism of other biographic methodologies and places each individual decision or fork in the road in the context – historical and sub cultural in which it was being made. However, as already stated I did not follow this process for all participants using it only for two – participants C and E.

### **Research Panels**

To guard against wild analysis BNIM uses research panels. This practice and my own research supervision provided a plurality of perspectives on the data which meant that my own hidden and not so hidden assumptions could be challenged from the different vantage points of individuals that made up the panels. BNIM uses research panels such as these to force a degree of objectivity into the process of data analysis.

There were 9 interpretative panels in total made up of a variety of professionals. The panels were made up of between three to six participants. Although I attempted to make these as heterogeneous as possible the degree I was able to accomplish this was limited. The panels did consist of, although not exclusively, people from a mental health, consultancy or education background. It was difficult to get a commitment for three hours from individuals to take part in the groups and this was a significant and limiting factor.

The panels had two tasks; firstly, to look chunk by chunk and word by word at a piece of transcript and to consider future blind what is happening and what is going to happen next. Secondly, a chronology was prepared and provided (stripped of any of the participants' own interpretation or valuation). This was also explored in future blind chunks, and the panel asked again to consider what is happening and what is going to happen next, drawing up hypotheses and counter hypotheses in a gradual process of refinement informed by the emergence of future events. In this way each segment, presented to the panel, is considered and used to focus on the '*historically-subjectively-in-situation*' (Wengraf 2001:34) which lies behind the manifest data.

This in turn is developed into structural hypotheses about the structure of the whole story – the 'lived life' and the 'told story' together – which provides the essence of the case.

Two examples of panel analysis are provided on the following pages (one of macro analysis of a lived life and the second a micro analysis of a transcript).

#### **BNIM FOCUS GROUP 6 SUMMARY OF PETER FUTURE BLIND MACRO ANALYSIS.**

##### **1948 Sister born**

##### **1950 Born into family of teachers**

More siblings born x  
Child minding by grandparents  
Already described in school terms  
Need for security in a good job  
Adopted x  
Problems with health x

##### **Strong Baptist upbringing**

Sunday school  
Move away  
Generation's worth of expectations  
Blue collar to white collar  
Religious expectations – strong work ethic  
Respectability of teaching in that era – pillar of community everyone knows

##### **Age 3 mum returns to work**

Mum very forceful  
Poverty creates financial necessity  
Mum breaking mould - who is caring for him?

##### **Catch bus home by self from school age 6**

Having to be independent at young age  
Separation and loss  
Expectations high on managing trip  
Latch key child

##### **Age 8 sang in choir (Anglican church)**



Listing achievements  
Religious musical connection  
Church providing second family – link between music and teaching  
Communication through music  
Who is he singing for mum or him?

#### **Failed 11+**

Not a surprise- no longer list of achievement - horror and shock at failure  
Will have to work extra hard to prove self  
Shame  
Consequences of not attending grammar school  
Parental disappointment could be catalyst for success in later life  
Go somewhere else - state school  
Go to parent's school  
Need for radical action – extra lessons, church school boarding school?

#### **Age 11 moved to Ripon**

Went to better school and re-sat exams  
A lot of pressure  
Failure matters in this family – will create fear of failure  
Powerful feelings of responsibility

#### **Age 12 passes 11+**

Education is everything in this family

#### **Age 16 attends 6<sup>th</sup>. Form. Sings in Cathedral Choir.**

The summer of love – singing in cathedral

#### **1968 Attends College of Education.**

Rivalry in profession between college of Education and University – narrows his options

#### **1970 Taught in a couple of schools**

**Joined 'unattached team' school to school 'acting deputy'**  
**Active in National Union of Head Teachers**

Speaking out what he feels is right  
Collective 'voice'  
Go against the grain if part of group  
Leadership aspect of TU is what interests him  
Wants to change things  
Left wing tendencies – linked to radical elements politically  
Image of marching with miners  
Religious stand against injustice – doing the right thing

#### **Age 31 (1981) First head teacher post.**

Very young where do you go next – OFSTED?  
Disillusionment

Becomes super head helping schools causing concern gets married and starts family

#### **1989 Working in Support Services (in service training).**

#### **1990 2<sup>nd</sup> Headship (7 years) mining village.**

Miner's strikes and unrest turning around difficult school  
Repairing things – fixing – around own failing – proving self  
Trying to make a difference  
Sensitive to expectations of others  
Sense of responsibility  
Helping others

**1991 Proposed to NUT conference should boycott SATS.**

Because it is measurement  
Need to just be – and not be measured on way through  
Sticking head up above parapet  
Confidence or lack of  
Working for underdog  
Fighting for those who do not make the grade  
Don't categorize  
Reparation  
The guilt because of his failure (trying to make it up to his mother)

**1997 3<sup>rd</sup> and Final Headship**

Promotion  
State school bigger school – struggling school  
Gets heard professionally self promotion and proving self  
Had sought fight all the way through  
Making up for earlier failings – but to quickly  
The void desperately trying to fill gaps  
Exhausting schedule – taking on too much

**2005 Breakdown/Retirement**

Word used in Education to convey struggle or emotional difficulties  
All search for meaning just collapses  
Never making expectations  
Breakdown occurs at age 11  
Ability to transcend expectations  
- but not feeling quality of success  
- so much pressure to fulfil expectation own parents children and staff and community – very high in these roles  
-

**At end of interview son is now a teacher.**

Lots of teachers married to other teachers – no let up all about education – becomes all consuming.

### BNIM FOCUS GROUP 3: SUMMARY OF PETER FUTURE BLIND MICRO ANALYSIS

#### Overall Passage

*And I think that stems from my early life where the fact that I hadn't, that I had failed something, was a big issue for my parents and therefore a big issue for me and I suppose it has influenced my philosophy about not labelling children as failures early in life, and so it probably colours a lot of my feelings about what the government is doing at the moment.*

**And** - A link being made – diversion hesitation and pause – too much to say another thing!

**And I** - Anxious pause – did something – explanation – at the mercy of events – ownership of something

#### **And I think**

Distancing and stepping back

Reflection

Driving home a point

#### **And I think that stems from my**

Early life description

Explanation of behaviour

Exploration and connection not made before

Intellectualization and dismissal

Eureka moment

#### **And I think that stems from my early life**

Explanation of 'bad' behaviour

Guilt had not done what should have done

#### **And I think that stems from my early life where the fact that I hadn't,**

Concentration on the 'I' – something about his mother father /parents – feeling of fear/ guilt getting scary

#### **And I think that stems from my early life where the fact that I hadn't, that I had failed something, was a big issue for my parents**

Distancing self – there's the answer now! Attempt to shut down tension between me and them

#### **And I think that stems from my early life where the fact that I hadn't, that I had failed something, was a big issue for my parents and therefore a big issue for me and I suppose it has influenced my philosophy**

This has affected me my life/ children/others my own children

#### **And I think that stems from my early life where the fact that I hadn't, that I had failed something, was a big issue for my parents and therefore a big issue for me and I suppose it has influenced my philosophy about not labelling children**

It affected the way I do my job/ the way I look at myself/ how I meet parental expectations

#### **And I think that stems from my early life where the fact that I hadn't, that I had failed something, was a big issue for my parents and therefore a big issue for me and I suppose it has influenced my philosophy about not labelling children as failures early in life, and so it probably colours a lot of my feelings about what the government is doing at the moment.**

He seems to be linking failing his parents expectations with governmental expectations.

I found these panels useful in the first instance, confirming or throwing into question some of my own thoughts and hypotheses - another way of triangulating some of the analysis providing an additional point of reflection. The main benefit was the confidence and learning it provided me with the interpretation of material. They also generated some interesting historical and societal associations which provided a wider sense of the contexts in which life stories had developed. However, while initially I found this extremely useful after a number of interviews I had a sense of diminishing returns: that the panels were not offering much in addition to my own interpretation or analysis (which I think had improved through the initial panels and supervision) which, even initially, did not after all appear to be that 'wild'. After nine BNIM research panels I discontinued them deciding they were offering little added value. I think perhaps if I was to follow this method of research again I would probably not use panels. Overall I found them a cumbersome and time consuming method of extracting data, which in my view was accessible more readily, with supervision perhaps providing a more efficient source of training (for data interpretation) triangulation and questioning. While I understand the need to guard against wild analysis (I never felt the speculations I had made were very much modified by the panels) I became concerned that a reliance on these protocols could distract from the data – even if this was purely a question of time and energy in running them.

In relation to the analysis of the data, the researcher using BNIM techniques would use this method (future blind analysis) for the whole transcript(s). I did not. After some deliberation and discussion with supervisors I moved at this point to a different model of analysis based on Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) deciding that the full multi stage vigour of BNIM was not required for all interviews. There is precedent in this combination of methods of analysis specifically through the Sostris project where Wengraf and Rustin (Rustin, 1998, Wengraf, 1998) analysed biographical case studies of individuals using Grounded Theory.

The full BNIM method of analysis, used with two sets of transcripts, served me well by eliciting the complexities of the material, and developing (via the panels) the capacity to produce interpretations of the material in which I could have confidence. However, the future-blind method was proving excessively labour intensive generating limited returns in terms of understanding. I decided for the remaining four interviews to adopt a version of Grounded Theory analysis, as I felt able to achieve comparable results in terms of interpretation and understanding, but in a more efficient way. I adapted this to include some of the key aspects of the BNIM approach, e.g. the lived/ told story categories which I felt delivered valuable insight.

### **The use of Grounded Theory methods in the research project.**

It is not unusual for BNIM or Grounded Theory to be used alongside another methodology. In this case I relied on Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to approach the data generated by BNIM. And in respect of grounded theory I did not use this in its purest form – if indeed that exists. According to the principles of Grounded Theory interpretive frames are constructed inductively as the research proceeds not from any predetermined logic, hypothesis or theory. Concepts and ideas are formed from the material and rigorously coded through increasing levels of abstraction. A comparison is made of the data through each stage of the analysis and alongside this theory is generated from the data itself. Theory generated must be relevant to the area of research, it must fit the data and it must produce explanation, understanding or be predictive.

In approaching Grounded Theory I relied heavily on the work of Charmaz (2006). Charmaz uses this approach not in a prescriptive sense but, in the spirit of Glaser and Strauss (1967) original work, in a flexible way, as a set of *'principles and practices'* (2006:9) to guide the approach and learn from the data. She uses a number of examples in her book from researchers who have used grounded theory and who, although they make no claim or allegiance to this method, have used it with imagination to produce good work. Rigidly using the model can, she suggests, on the contrary be limiting. *'Mechanistic applications of methods yield mundane data and routine reports. A keen eye, open*

*mind, discerning ear, and steady hand can bring you close to what you study and are more important than developing methodological tools.'* (2006: 15).

Charmaz extends the work of Glaser and Strauss shifting away from the positivist origins of the methodology and instead incorporates more constructionist methods that have been developed in recent years. The result is a more fluid and more reflexive approach to data analysis which I felt suited the data and research area I had before me.

These approaches recognize that interviewee and interviewer are engaged in the co construction of meaning which includes unconscious dynamics that arise during interview. This supports the consideration by the researcher of unconscious communication – transference, counter transference, and projective identification.

Armstrong (2004) writing of the analytic object in working with organizations also suggests using counter transference as a tool for understanding. These unconscious dynamics impact on the research relationship and by adopting a reflexive approach I tried to understand my own counter transference and projective identification to participants and this also informed my understanding of psycho social aspects of the encounter. Attending to the emotional dimensions between researcher and researched, would also support an understanding of the organization-in-the-mind held by participants as something manifest in the research encounter.

Charmaz (2006) suggests that the researcher's positioning within the research encounter is unavoidably subjective and this includes an acknowledgement that any use of grounded theory cannot be purely inductive or theory free.

*'We are not scientific observers who can dismiss scrutiny of our values by claiming scientific neutrality and authority. Neither observer nor observed come to the scene untouched by the world'* (Charmaz 2006:15).

Throughout this study, I have adopted a reflective stance knowing and understanding that I am, as I have highlighted earlier, also a product of the field being studied with my own views about

education and a theoretical model in mind by which I may gain insight. While I was not starting from a predetermined hypothesis I did have a psycho social - or more specifically a systems psychodynamic - theoretical perspective in mind through which I would draw in my approach to the data. I have set out my own theoretical orientation and perspective within the literature review. It is important to note that the relevance of certain aspects of this i.e. the organization in the mind, was a surprise to me, and came from the analysis of material not from a predetermined perception of usefulness or relevance as I shall set out later in this chapter.

Anderson (2006) establishes how grounded theory and a psychoanalytical perspective provide useful partnership in understanding and approaching clinical data. She argues that it is 'inevitable' (2006: 334) that researchers have a theoretical mindset; however, this does not mean that data is approached looking for particular themes. A theoretical model being held in mind by the researcher – in this case a psychoanalytical paradigm – should not detract from data generated because essentially this is no different from any other method of scientific inquiry. It is impossible to approach a study with empty mind. Therefore in looking at the data and in establishing theoretical codes psychoanalytical perspectives informed my thinking and therefore my approach to understanding the data.

### **Grounded Theory and Coding**

There were multiple sources of data; the interview transcripts and recordings themselves, field notes and my research diary, as well as the interpretative panels I set up and research supervision. After a number of trials of software and a variety of colour coded systems, I eventually chose to keep the method of analysis simple. Some of the initial tools had in my view over complicated the process of analysis, becoming more of a focus than the data itself and distracting me from seeing content. As Clarke and Hoggett (2009) comment becoming '*master of the data analysis rather than servant*' (2009:20). This question arose in my mind, both in relation to BNIM and Grounded Theory, that when the methodological approach to analysis becomes central, so driven by protocol (no

doubt to support academic credentials), does it run a risk of losing contact with the data or at least not getting to the real story within the data? I think in the end I felt it did. I chose to return to a more basic approach which felt more in touch (more grounded) with the data itself.

According to the principles of Grounded Theory coding is connected to what the researcher sees in the data, and codes are created and emerge from the analysis of data and the meaning found within. Coding is the initial stage of assimilating data. To start with I simply read through transcripts making notes in margins or on 'post it' notes. Then dividing the page in half I did this again in a more thorough manner. Here is an example;

<p>I was either at work, doing work at home (laughs) or thinking about work to the extent that I was thinking about it all the time, and worrying about it. And I started to worry about things that might go wrong. I had had a long time as a head so I had been used to, you know, the responsibilities that you have and I had not worried too much about things going wrong, but I started to get really paranoid I suppose almost about the things that could happen that would be bad. You know a child having an accident at school and dying, you know, that's always the case, you can be a head for donkey's years and that's always there but suddenly I used to worry about it. I would wake up in the middle of the night thinking about work, all my dreams were nightmares and they were all about work. And if I was on holiday even abroad I would be thinking about work all the time. I would be taking work with me, my laptop, I would be working on my holidays, if I was on the beach (laughs) on holiday I</p>	<p>Breakdown of boundaries at between work and home.</p> <p>Report about worrying and getting paranoid about what might go wrong</p> <p>Experienced HT <u>use to</u> managing these feelings usually almost accepted these responsibilities.</p> <p>Moving and powerful description of the effects of the role and the build up to later breakdown (predictable from previous narrative.)</p> <p>i.e. child accident or death. Sense of dread. Part of fears and anxieties schools have to manage (always there) only now starts to worry. Sense that experience does not make you immune to stress and breakdown.</p> <p>Report of becoming consumed by work and worries connected – 'all my dreams were nightmares'. Again breakdown of boundaries home /work.</p> <p>Again breakdown of home work boundary – no respite from work.</p> <p>Sounds in a very bad way consumed by stress with predictable impact on leadership</p> <p>Technology (laptop) meaning one can work from home all the time!</p>
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<p>would still be thinking about work and I became ill really as a result of all of that. Then suddenly I found myself at work for the last month or two that I was at work I couldn't make a decision, trivial trivial decisions (laughs) I couldn't make any.... I suddenly couldn't relate to people and I had always been very good at that, I would lose my temper which I had never done, you know with children, with parents. I would find myself wandering around the school, I wouldn't know what I was doing where I was going, I would occupy my time doing trivial things when there were important things that needed doing, and I suppose after being like that for well over a month, probably two months, I just knew that I wasn't safe anymore. I had a really bad conflict with a parent one day and I think that was what really made me think, you know, you are not fit to be here.</p>	<p>Not being able to keep work out making him unwell – personal evaluation of circumstances he finds himself in and why.</p> <p>Sense of this being a shock 'suddenly' not predicted.</p> <p>Unable to make decisions – sounds in a very bad way</p> <p>Unable to relate to people (previously good at this) – growing sense of disconnection and alienation.</p> <p>Losing temper with staff, children and parents.</p> <p>Wandering around school – no sense of someone else who can support him.</p> <p>'I wasn't safe anymore' - loss of safety for others – for self as well? Still no sense of support for him.</p> <p>Report of really bad conflict <u>with a parent</u> – correlation with other ht - parental conflict precipitating stress and breakdown</p> <p>Conflict with parent – final realisation that he should not be at work. Comes to decision himself no sense of someone else helping.</p>
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The second stage of coding involved re reading the data and arranging the initial coding into categories or 'typologies'. In practice I did this with memo notes but have tidied it up below;

Transcript	Initial coding.	Typology/ Category
<i>Head teachers and teachers respond to additional pressures</i>	Global evaluation applied here to all head teachers. Suggesting that	<b>Overall Category: Stress:</b>  <b>Sub group: Reparation - Anxiety</b>

<i>often by working harder. They are reluctant to take a break when the early symptoms of illness appear. They feel guilty if they do take time off and so they push and push and push themselves until a point when they do have a real serious breakdown.</i>	at both an individual level and a collective level this occupational group are driven to respond to additional pressures through defences which mean they have to work harder and harder.' They' feel guilty - a sense of other head teachers being pushed onwards by these feelings (and defences).	<b>and guilt driving individual onwards when under threat. Both a defence against anxiety but increasing stress.</b>  <b>Sub Group: Defence Individual.</b>  <b>Sub Group: Defence organisational.</b>
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The use and value of coding according to Coffey and Atkinson (1996) is that it can, *[B]reak up and segment the data into simpler, general categories and is used to expand and tease out the data, in order to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation.'* (1996:30).

Through constant editing and cross referencing meanings and patterns emerged in the text which I started to form into conceptual categories.

This initially was completed for each individual narrative in a continual process of comparison and cross referencing of data and category and where data did not correspond to category a further category was formed, and so on.

I used the process described as 'clustering' (Charmaz, 2006) which provides a visual model to explore interconnections between different aspects of typologies and other typologies already identified through this sub categories became apparent as well as connections between categories and between participants.

### **Case Studies and Cross Case Analysis**

As much as possible I tried to avoid cross case comparisons prior to completing all transcripts in an attempt to stay close to the individual data and avoiding the pitfall or temptation of searching for themes or categories that are already established (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). When the analysis had been completed for all individual transcripts I then considered comparisons across all transcripts of

each of the participants. This led to a reorganising of categories whereby I clustered corresponding themes that had emerged from individual accounts into an overall index of categories for the group. In practice this was done via post it notes of segments of transcript and quotes under headings of relevant themes placed across my office wall – a wall paper that although untidy was extremely effective in helping me understand the topology of the data.

Within my research diary I started developing these ideas under headings (i.e. reparation as motivation, early childhood difficulty as motivation, educational failure, public service focus, parents in teaching, selecting a 'semi profession', etc) in a process that Charmaz (2006) refers to as 'memo writing',

*'Memos give you a space and place for comparisons between data and data, data and codes, codes of data and other codes, codes and category, and category and concept and for articulating conjectures about these comparisons'. (2006:72).*

It was a process of sifting, playing with ideas, reflecting, theorising and thinking and re thinking trying to understand the interconnectedness and from this formulate a thread of understanding. As Charmaz summarises,

*'When you theorise, you reach down to fundamentals, up to abstractions, and probe into experience. The content of theorising cuts to the core of studied life and poses new questions about it.'* (2006:135).

This process of investigation, moving between different narrative accounts, allowed a deeper understanding of the historical and organizational dimensions of the participants' experiences to emerge.

Case studies allow, through processes of comparison, interrelated variables and differing dimensions to be considered over time in a dynamic manner. Individuals and social structures are not in themselves independent. Social structures are enacted through individuals and in turn also impact on individuals. Case studies enable the relationship between the two to be explored.

## **The Organization-in-the-Mind**

The concept of the organization-in-the-mind (Armstrong, 2005) had not really stood out in any way as part of my initial thinking about the data. It was a concept that through the interviews and later through the data analysis had become prominent. I began to discover the concept anew and this time with greater understanding. I did not have a full understanding of this concept as applied by Armstrong (2005) when I started, more the earlier version espoused by (Hutton, Bazalgette, and Reed, 1997). So when I started to perceive it within the transcripts I initially thought I had discovered something original, something new – until rereading Armstrong. Then I really understood what he was suggesting.

Later, when considering from this perspective I came to see that much of the coding and comments on the narrative could be understood not only as a personal experience or recollection but also, at a different level, as an internal construction of the organization-in-the-mind. The application of this theory illuminated a hitherto unseen aspect of the organization. These were probably ‘unthought’ (Bollas, 1987) aspects rather than unconscious ones and as such appeared a manifestation of the primary process within the organization.

It was as if the participants’ narratives, constructed in hindsight were also tempered and forged by their current organizational circumstances. The choice of material constructed and then retrospectively presented could be understood to be representative of the current context in which they worked. It was an important realisation, and after many hours of data analysis it came as a kind of eureka moment.

I re- read all material adding a fourth column in which I reconsidered transcripts from the perceptive of the organisation-in- the-mind noting my thoughts as I went. An example is provided below and on the next page.

Transcript	Reflections on Narrative.	Typology/ Category	Organization in the Mind
<p><i>My memories are of running the tuck shops, being in control of the money. We went off to Hadrian's Wall and we did a lot of walking and I remember being the guide of the walk. I was only 14 but I was great at walking and map reading and I kind of lead them all off. You can't really get lost on Hadrian's Wall to be fair, we had adult youth workers there, obviously. There is very much a bossy controllness about it all and that still comes out now that I absolutely like it my way and people know better than to kind of cross that if I have made it quite clear how I want it to be. Not always a good quality to be honest, it has its moments, there are times to put your foot down and times to ease off a little bit, I guess. 'I remember people moaning constantly that they were tired. There was one guy who was quite overweight, Brian, and he just moaned the whole time that his feet were hurting, he had blisters and I remember all that kind of stuff and I</i></p>	<p>Thin PIN. Relaying different experiences of leadership growing up. Very driven 'bossy controllness' about account even at young age – plays down the role of others and indeed did not appear to be concerned about other children – they appear more of a hindrance.</p> <p>There is no sense of support for the other – indeed a sense of ruthlessness is conveyed.</p> <p>Sense that motivation for working as a head teacher is not</p>	<p><b>1.Need for control/ Status.</b></p> <p><b>2.Leadership experience in childhood as precursor for later roles.</b></p> <p><b>3.Need for self reliance in childhood.</b></p> <p><b>4. Relevance of Childhood to later work role/style – explicit link.</b></p>	<p>Passage conveys a sense of control and ruthlessness in seeking the goal or target – the goal is more important than process - with a sense of threat looming in the background for self and for people one manages – you have to do what you are told in this school (societal) environment.</p> <p>Need for control imperative.</p> <p>A sense that the weak, ill equipped, or vulnerable are left to flounder.</p> <p>No sense of support outside</p>

<i>was just like powering on at top speed, we've got to get to the hostel and all that kind of stuff, just ignoring everyone's moans. I remember stuff like that.'</i>	about supporting children but more about a <b>need for control and status.</b>		has to be self sufficient in this system.
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I came to recognise that the narratives of participants represented something of their current organizational circumstances - through their selections and the remembering of stories and anecdotes and the feelings induced in me, which appeared to illuminate how they were now positioned in their current contexts. Likewise, the coding, the typologies and headings I had formulated were significant as a representation on the organization collectively held in the mind by participants and the different aspects therein. The introduction of this theoretical model at this juncture supported and enhanced my understanding of the research data.

I have since discovered that others, (Boydel, 2009) have also used the construct of organisation-in-the-mind in research work in considering case studies of a Health Action Zone in Northern Ireland where she used the idea of 'partnership in the mind' to considerable effect.

To summarise, overall the analysis of the data proceeded in four stages. The first being the initial BNIM analysis, the second the application of Grounded Theory to transcripts, the third the introduction of the concept of organization-in-the-mind, and then finally the process of writing up the case studies where a fully picture emerged. It was during this stage that some categories were refined and others, which no longer seemed as relevant, were omitted.

## **Ethics and Validity**

All participants were sent a brief introduction about the nature of the research. From this they may have established a number of facts about me which may have influenced the interview.

They may have ascertained from my initial introduction something of my professional background (a copy of the research pack I sent to participants is provided in Appendix A) and this may have created some gravity in the way they have represented their answers. The most obvious of which would be, given my role in child mental health, to perhaps speaking of their own childhoods. Although this was not invited by the question that I put to them, it was certainly not prohibited and knowledge of my background would perhaps have provided some support for an answer which provided these kinds of reflections.

It was a conscious decision to be this explicit and, on balance, I felt it important to give some level of disclosure about my background knowing it would have some effect, but feeling that I had to give myself a context which also differentiated me from a role in education.

Participant well being was a key consideration. The open ended nature of the questioning meant that participants could recall earlier (or indeed current) events or memories they did not expect to. These possibly forgotten recollections could be distressing. If at any time this became apparent, I would offer to put participants in touch with a consultant and/ or someone who was therapeutically trained who could provide additional support if required after interview.

Assurances were given throughout about anonymity and confidentiality. Participants would not be referred to by name and any identifying feature in interview transcripts would be changed. All data produced would be stored and treated in line with data protection protocols as laid out in the initial ethics proposal and on completion destroyed.

There are strong ethical considerations within psycho social research which goes beyond the more structural facets described above. There is a chance by not taking things at face value of misinterpretation or perhaps more accurately misrepresentation of individuals by not hearing or instead by trying to fit their narratives into preconceived ideas that fit the desired outcome or hypothesis of the researcher. The choosing of what is relevant or the types of question to be asked all in some way reveal how we can bring our own ideas to bear or choose which ideas to avoid.

The structure of research supervision both individual and group and the interpretation panels supported me in addressing some of my own defended and hidden ideas and assumptions.

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) advise discussing research data with colleagues and within supervision to support the exploration of hidden material – a research process akin to clinical supervision. This I did. And the awareness gained provided an additional dimension pushing me to consider in what way I was contributing to the data through my own assumptions or positioning in relation to the area of research. In practice this meant that I kept detailed notes after interview of my thoughts and reflections of both the person I interviewed, and the environment I met them in, as well as my own feelings and perceptions of how I had conducted and felt during the process of interview. This was in line with BNIM debriefing procedures which encourages making notes in a free-associative manner. This would later provide crucial data of the here and now experience of interview and would be useful in uncovering and throwing light on more subtle dynamics that arose within the interview process and my own counter transference to participants.

The research diary and field notes also supported me in externalising and processing some of the thoughts and frustrations with the material in a way that allowed some consideration about my own processes linked to what I was finding. While I do not pretend that it made me immune to collusion or merging with participants or the other side of the coin - over privileging, super imposing or projecting my own ideas onto them however it did support taking a 'third position' (Britton, 1989). A space to look back at myself within the research encounters a position to challenge my own defensiveness and frequently unacknowledged assumptions.

I came to recognise how difficult it is to untangle one's own experience from those I have chosen to research. Frequently I was thrown back on my own biography and the choices I made to become a social worker, a manager, and indeed a consultant, as well as my own social and cultural assumptions, positioning and values. This exposed perceived and actual differences and similarities with participants, which I found both surprising and shocking. I have explored this in more detail elsewhere



but here highlight the importance of recognising one's own historical and biographical assumptions and the potential impact. Reflection and reflexivity are required in equal measure. However, the unconscious nature of biases is harder, if not impossible to track. Reflection is perhaps, because of this, only a starting point in a reflexive methodology.

## **Conclusion**

I doubt whether I could have obtained the quality and depth of data with a Grounded Theory approach alone. BNIM interview method was invaluable in gaining access to the depth of material at interview. Grounded Theory by itself might not have achieved this because as a method it is eclectic, adapted to data of many kinds, whereas I needed right from the start an interview method of adequate depth. Likewise the meticulous BNIM approach enhanced my approach to interpretation which in turn supported the use of the more holistic model of Grounded Theory in later stages for the majority of participants. This joint methodological approach had many benefits; allowing me to achieve a multi layered understanding of the experience of all the participants. The BNIM interview procedure has also supported me as a consultant – in not feeling the need to interrupt, in listening to the gestalt (and asking questions in the order of telling), and listening carefully for points of irrelevance which from this research appeared to frequently represent or indicate something being conveyed on a deeper level (representative in some way of the organization-in-the-mind) of which the client may not be fully aware.

If I was approaching another study I may well seek a similar model – perhaps this time using BNIM approaches to data collection, with a Grounded Theory method of analysis but this time merely enriched with some key BNIM concepts (for instance the distinction between lived and told stories). I do feel that this methodological partnership is a very useful application to research of this kind with direct relevance to the systems psychodynamic approaches to consultancy practice.

## Chapter 6

### Participant A: 'Alison' - Head Teacher (Female 40's/ Inner City)

#### Biographical Data Chronology

1962: Alison born. Parents both teachers (Dad retired early, age 55). Mum stopped teaching before she was born. She had one older sister (age unknown).

1965: Youngest sister born.

1972: Youngest sister placed on special needs register.

1973: Alison attends private secondary school.

1979: At age 17 she contracts glandular fever.

1979: Alison leaves school half way through 6<sup>th</sup> form (not completing A levels).

1980: Works as a Secretary.

1981: Starts A levels at evening classes.

1984: Age 22 years starts teaching degree.

1985: Age 23 moves in with current partner.

1987: Started teaching

1996 (?): 'Acting up' as deputy head teacher.

1997: Application for three deputy headships and then gets accepted for one.

2000: Has time off with stress.

2001: Applies for headship but is unsuccessful.

2002: Gets first headship.

2006: Good OFSTED

2007: Applies for second and current headship.

## Biographical Data Chronology

The first participant (I will call her Alison) was in her early forties at the time of interview and already planning her retirement in 2012. From the interview some key phases of her life were apparent.

### Early childhood: Parental expectations.

Alison's parents had both been teachers, although her mother had stopped teaching just prior to her birth. She was the middle daughter of three sisters. Her older sister was seen as being very academic and successful and this appeared to have created high expectations for Alison, at home and in school. She struggled to maintain these throughout her school life. Her younger sister was on the special needs register at school, and was reported to have experienced a difficult time because of this. This appeared to have had some impact on Alison and her view about education.

The reported views of her parents and grandparents about strict discipline at home appeared to have a strong influence on her and her approach to discipline and inclusion in school as a head teacher.

Like other participants, she reflects on her own childhood, but briefly, doubting how useful it is. She nonetheless draws attention to her 'fathers temper' and the negotiation and tension between her own childhood experience and her relationship with parents and the children, and parents she now supports in role.

*'Probably just as well but I don't think it is terribly useful as a teacher to think "when I was a child this happened and that happened" because things have changed. But when I have parents say to me 'well of course you can't discipline them, the disciplines not good because you are not allowed to hit them....' I was never hit as a child, or if I was I really have no recollection. I talked to my mum and dad about this and dad sort of said 'You sure?' because he has got quite a temper on him. But I am positive I was never, certainly never hit, I really can't remember if anyone even did that to me because*

*something in the way we were brought up was that we wanted to please our parents, we wanted to do the right thing...’.*

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This extract is also suggestive of her desire to please her parents. What may be elucidated here is her difficulty in moving beyond their expectations.

**Adolescence and Early Adulthood: Illness. Prematurely leaving school. Concern with status and a struggle to live up to expectations.**

Alison attended a private secondary school but at 17 contracted glandular fever and it appears, because of the amount of education she misses, she decides to leave - part way through the 6<sup>th</sup> form - failing to complete her ‘A’ levels. She now finds herself prematurely in the job market and enrolls at a secretarial school and then finds work as a secretary. She holds this role for sometime but, as it does not live up to the expectations and aspirations of her schooling, she leaves.

*‘I think I was such an educational snob from being at this very academic private secondary school that when I went to a college to do a secretarial school I had to come top in everything. There was no way I was going to let any of these girls, that had only ever ... sort of thing, which is terrible isn’t it? There was a woman there on a YOPS training course who had the same idea as me, that she wasn’t going to let these little wipper-snappers and the two of us just vied to get 100% in everything. I had never been like that at school, I never gave a dam about what I got, so yeah that was quite nice doing well in everything. Then I went to work and I must have worked for 2 or 3 years and so I was in my early 20’s and must have just thought, ‘How can I possibly be doing this when I am as old as 30, it’s not demanding enough’ and I think that also must have come from the sort of ethos of my secondary school where we*

*were always being told that academically we were really top in the country and you can do it, you can do it.'*

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Status now appears a key motivation, although it is tempered by a realisation that she was not in the 'top flight' at her selective school.

### **Adulthood, marriage, employment and a return to education.**

She returns to complete her 'A' levels at evening class. Underneath this decision appears to be a preoccupation with status, as highlighted above, and her early academic 'failure' to complete her 'A' levels. These may have been motivating forces in themselves, but amid a narrow, and rather limited, perception of other professional opportunities, she chooses to follow her parents, and trains to be a teacher. An apparent easy and more familiar option compared with law and medicine.

*'And I was thinking very narrowly then because I don't think I knew about the big wide world and I thought I don't want to do medicine I know that, and I wouldn't have a hope in hell of getting into a course anyway, and I think probably I thought what courses can you do a degree and get work from? You can do medicine, you can do law, you can do teaching and I think that was as far as I thought. And I knew I wouldn't get on to law, I didn't know enough about them, I suppose everyone knows about teaching because they have all been to school. Then this woman said that she was doing her second A level that year and she had got into Avery Hill which was quite close by and it just sounded brilliant and from then on I was quite sure that was what I wanted to do and it all started to fall into place.'*

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Her parents appeared to provide a source of identification through their careers but interestingly, when it came down to it, she explains that they did not want her to, or at least are indifferent towards her, following teaching as a career pathway.

She starts her teaching degree at 22 years of age, recalling this *'was just after all the industrial action had happened in the 1980's.'* Her narrative of over thirty years in education reflected something of the reducing influence of the Trade Unions, (and the increasing influence of technology and inspection) and, although she herself once went on strike in early 1990 there was, after this report, no further mention of Union activity.

She met her current partner (also a teacher) when she was 22. They decide early on not to have children, and in some respects this appears to be a sacrifice required of the role; she struggles to see how people cope with working with children and then return home to their own children every evening.

This participant appeared to struggle to be authentic in role, and indeed during the interview appeared to be managing disparate images of herself and the school. There were two main narratives concerning stress: one as a head teacher and one as a deputy, which had necessitated a significant period of time off sick.

*'During that time I had some time off this stress, and I am very much of the belief that for me in that situation, I had control of that situation and I didn't handle it well and you know. I wasn't recognisable to me during that time but I do think it was our relationship that caused that. But I do think there were other things I should have done, although I think I have got more of an understanding and empathy for people when they are suffering with stress.'*

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The latter report of stress was the result of a difficult relationship with the head teacher. It appeared to demonstrate how the high levels of autonomy of head teachers could be problematic if the person in role was not managing or struggling themselves with stress or ill health.

*'Looking back on it, I don't recognise myself as that person. I remember the day I went home was the day I tried to put a page break in a document and I*

*couldn't make a page break go in and it was awful. But you know that's not why I was ill, it's quite hard to think this built up and this built up but I know I was really unhappy, I know I was doing an awful lot and I think she was a really difficult person. And I think probably she had had enough and certainly wasn't very focused on things to do with the school. I suppose the difficult thing is that I really don't think it was her fault and I don't want it to sound like I think it was her fault but we didn't work well together for quite a period and she had the power in the relationship and I think she used it in a bad way. But you know she was also very ill.'*

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### **Ambivalence: Moving into headship**

Her route to headship was reported as unplanned. She speaks in a rather fatalistic manner about her career, illustrated by this comment;

*'I think a lot of what's happened to me in teaching I have felt has been about being in the right place at the right time.'*

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Despite this view of her progression, it appeared she had to try rather hard to get where she had; applying for three deputy headships and then two applications for headships before being successful. Clearly there were a number of occasions when she had not been in the right place at the right time.

In fact, despite finding her first 'acting up' role as a deputy head stressful, she finds her return to classroom teaching rather boring and this, alongside an underlying need for status appears to push her to apply for more senior posts. Her reportedly poor experience of head teachers provides some justification for her applications as she concludes that she can 'do better.'

At the time of interview she was in her second headship, and as I stated earlier, already planning early retirement.

## Summary of Biographical Data Chronology

Alison's lived life reveals that, despite a number of setbacks, she perseveres in attempts to find a job and role that she felt was of sufficient status, given her academic and family background. Alongside this is a sense that she saw herself as second best to her older sister and some of her peers at school which saw her identify and choose teaching as a middle of the road and familiar profession. Headship appeared to confer status while providing her with another outlet for her abilities. At the time of interview there appeared to be some doubt if she should have chosen this pathway over a more financially rewarding one.

## Thematic Analysis

Alison starts quickly by reporting that she never thought she would be a head teacher. This is followed by a report of '*appalling*' practice in her current school and her struggle to change it – but instead she describes finding herself '*going along with it*'. It feels a rather impotent and fatalistic position. This is interrupted quickly by a description of a problematic relationship she had, while a deputy head teacher, with her previous head teacher which results in her taking time off with stress. These rather desperate beginnings are quickly contradicted by reports of turning her first school around as head teacher and then achieving a good OFSTED report. This is followed by a series of reports, of months of inactivity, boredom and depression and then her plans to retire when she is fifty.

An evaluation early in the next part of her narrative introduces one of the main undercurrents of her story. She describes herself as a '*lazy perfectionist*' a point on which she will later elaborate;

*'I think deep down inside I am a really lazy person. I am also a bit of a perfectionist so it's that kind of balance between 'can I get away with doing nothing and still be satisfied?'*

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An evaluation introduces the second underlying and possibly the main undercurrent of the initial narrative about motivation and career progression, the idea that she has always '*in the right place at the right time*'. This idea, already mentioned above, is repeated three times during her narrative and is accompanied at this point by an awkward and uneasy exploration of feeling a fraud, that she has been fooling people by being a head teacher.

A series of rather distant reports about her headship in her new school is followed by a narrative of feeling stressed, and sick with guilt after closing the school for two days because of snow (when in hindsight she should only have closed for one).

A comment that children should '*do what they are told*' is quickly linked with a narrative about her family: the high expectations of parents, the success of her older sister, and the strict discipline at home (and her father's temper).

In the latter part of the interview she appeared to muse in an idealistic manner about what it would be like if she had remained as a secretary. She felt she might be working at Merrill Lynch earning more money than she currently did. She perceived this as an alternative professional life perhaps?

She then follows this with a series of comments related to how people work with children and then come home to children at night, which in turn leads a narrative about her family and a report of the difficulties her younger sister had while at school because of her special needs. More musing about the peers she once had at school and what they might be doing now brings us to the end of the interview.

### **Case Structure**

The narrative felt very much like an emotional roller coaster: moments of stress followed by elation, success, and then stress and the alternative future of retirement. The themes of perfectionism and status featured accompanied by an underlying narrative about ambivalence may have supported this alternating pattern, as if high ideals and expectations were difficult to sustain just for their own sake. Authority both in relation to oneself, the management of children and the management of staff is a key tenet of her narrative.

## Summary and discussion

This participant appeared to be biding her time until she retired. There was a sense throughout the interview of aimlessness which seemed to permeate her professional life. It appeared she had chosen teaching because it afforded her a level of status (perhaps in her parent's eyes) as opposed to income (which her sister's occupation apparently provided). She rose up through the professional ranks not so much by design but through recognising the limitations of more senior staff, deciding that she could do better. This, as I have stated, was her initial motivation along with 'boredom' (of classroom teaching) for headship. Here she compares herself with a fast track head teacher she knows;

*'And yet I do know a fast track head teacher.... she is really really nice and really dedicated and committed. It's not like she's somebody who just wants to be there and wants to be the boss and push people out of the way to get there. It was never something within my comprehension that you know going in to it with that ultimate thing in mind and yet the way the fast track system works you start as a teacher with the intention of fast tracking through to deputy head ship and headship. I don't get it, I don't know how you know that that's what you want to do or how you think or know that you have got the potential to do that.'*

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As a head teacher, she appeared to use a high level of delegation to manage. She had regretted this on occasion, as it left her exposed to criticism from the poor decision making of subordinates causing her considerable guilt and stress.

*'I don't know where I have got this amazing guilt from because I am not Catholic or anything. And I think it took me quite a long time to talk to the Deputy Head about it. We have talked about it a couple of times since and I*

*did talk to her about it before, quite soon after the event but I really did think it was my fault and it was my fault because I was the Head. But it was also my fault because as the Head I had delegated responsibility to the extent that if she made a decision I would often not think about it I would just go along with it.'*

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This management style appeared, at times, to leave her paralysed in her new and current headship. When faced with high levels of poor practice, she seemed unable to take up her authority – because of a good OFSTED report and the public image of the school. She recounted how she was left in a rather intolerable and impotent position of having to go along with practice while feeling it was wrong and incongruent with her own values and professional standards.

This may reflect the other side of a 'good' inspection, generating complacency, and along with it an erosion of head teacher's potency to create internal change when not mandated by the external judgment of inspectors.

There appeared to be an absence of any sense of accomplishment or vision (other than retirement), which served as a compass for leadership. In its place appeared disillusionment and a lack of belief in her capacity to change anything.

*'I think it has almost gone, it's gone to what people worry about when they say, 'Oh, it's very relaxed here isn't it?' At my last school when they would say that I would say, 'Yes it is but we have this structure and this structure is how this works and this is how this works.' And there just doesn't seem to be very much of that where I am now, so it has been a real, real shock and the day that your e mail came through I read it and I laughed hysterically otherwise I would have cried. I have had days when I had just gone to work and thought 'what the hell have you done' but if I was still at my last school it would have been awful as well. I think the changes are more positive than*

*negative but it is incredibly hard and I really didn't think.....You sort of think you know how to do your job and you are just going to do your job in this place and then you are going to go to this place and do your job. It doesn't really matter how many courses on changing culture and those sorts of things you go on. Actually, when you get there, you realise how little you know about the place you have come to.'*

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Despite evidence that she was a competent and skilled manager and head teacher, she appeared to present herself in some respects as an accidental tourist. She seemed to have lost direction and motivation and appeared rather disassociated, despondent and trapped. Her escape plan was provided by the retirement she now was actively anticipating, although still some years away.

*'And it is actually really, really boring dealing with children who won't do what they are told all the time. It's not a challenge you know, it's not professionally exciting (laughs), and it's dull as can be.'*

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She recounted how she had told her executive coach that she only had another five years left in the job, to which her coach had replied her description had sounded like a 'prison sentence'. She told me this was precisely what it felt like. Her childless circumstances here gave some advantage, allowing her to plan to leave the profession early without having dependents to be concerned about.

*'.....I kind of know I am missing out on something. I know that I haven't got someone for whom I am special in that way. That only a parent can be special but I have got some absolutely wonderful nephews and nieces and I have 350 kids at school every day and I wouldn't say I love them all, but I'm working on it (laughs).'*

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Her preoccupation later in the interview with Merrill Lynch was clearly a moment in her life when she could have chosen a different path. Instead, she returned to the career of her parents, a professional choice which appeared to gain her higher status, and perhaps when compared with secretarial work, was more in line with her previous peers from private school.

Teaching appeared a default position, predictably perhaps, given her parents occupational background. The career choice she makes represents a level of familial and social continuity, a safe and predictable option which avoided risky or unknown pathways.

This participant was one of the few who spoke about the role of Governors. But she did not perceive them as either a source of support, motivation or direction. She felt overall governors had little to offer.

Overall, authority figures and indeed authority itself was generally viewed in a rather negative light throughout her narrative. Although she was disparaging of her former mentors and role models, stating that she '*could do better*', it did appear at times (rather paradoxically) that she somewhat identified with them in her own management style. The absence of any good role modelling figures in her career is perhaps reflected in what appeared a rather restrictive approach to leadership.

There did not appear any ongoing system or structure that could continue to drive the school other than the head teacher and, therefore, much appeared to be dependent on this role.

Although capable, she appeared unable to address any external factors in a way that could have been supportive to her in role or useful to the school. An internal sense of power and authority, which in description was limited to a narrow set of status aspirations, foundered when faced with wider aspects of the role and became even more problematic when organizational spheres of influence were expanding.

Her overall position appeared insular and inward looking. Coupled with a rather fatalistic view of her circumstances, it appeared to leave her without recourse to wider resource. This said, it would be easy from her narrative to forget that she was a head teacher in a school that was perceived by

OFSTED and the wider community as 'good'. Clearly, in many ways, she had been effective and yet there was a sense that for her something was missing.

Despite being an engaging, articulate and energetic speaker, this felt by far the most depressing of all interviews. I came away struggling to understand this emotional response. The narrative had not been dominated by accounts of stress or depression and yet these were the underlying emotional experience (along with irritation) that I was left with.

I concluded that this had more to do with the sense of hopelessness that permeated the interview and a fundamental absence of passion or belief in the role. She struck me as disaffected, disassociated, and disconnected with the work and it was hard to connect her with the task of educating children who were rarely mentioned and at no time prominent in her narrative. It was perhaps this absence that conveyed a bankruptcy of purpose, where the only aspiration left was to leave. It felt, at interview, that she may have left, psychologically at least, already. I had the sense of someone that was no longer connected or fused with the role. It felt like a tremendously sad and prolonged end.

Her personal aspirations, competition, and search for status can also be understood, in relation to the organization-in-the-mind, as revealing institutional and occupational drives and preoccupations which made it hard to appear anything less than 'good'. I wondered whether her experience conveyed in this way revealed something systemically about the sacrifices of the role: authenticity and the difficulty in engaging, both on a personal and institutional level, with the realities of the work and indeed with learning, in any meaningful way.

## **Chapter 7**

**Participant B: 'Jane' Head Teacher Female 50s Large town primary school in area of social disadvantage.**

### **Biographical Data Chronology**

1953: Jane born in a South Wales Village mother social worker father Safety officer for National Coal Board.

1957: Jane started primary school age 4

1964: passed 11+

1972: Teacher training and working in Children Homes during the holidays.

1976: Qualified as a teacher

1977: Moved to XXXX 1<sup>st</sup> teaching post in area of social disadvantage.

1980: 2<sup>nd</sup> teaching post – Jane gets married

1980/81: Moved to Middle East Working British Council for teaching English as a foreign language

Dad Died age 51 (?)

1983/4: Jane transferred to Brazil Started English School for Ex Pats

1986? Returned to Scotland and worked in Oil Company as a Clerk. 1<sup>st</sup>. Child born

1988: Returned to XXXXX working as a supply teacher. 2<sup>nd</sup> Child Born

1991: Diploma in Education Management – specialised in dyslexia

1993 (?): Acting Deputy Post

1995 – 2006 (?): Worked as Advisory Deputy 8 different schools

2006: First headship post in a deprived school

2007: Permanent headship post current school.

## Biographical Data Chronology

The second most experienced participant – Jane - had worked in schools for nearly thirty years. However, within this time she had also travelled, had children, and worked in other services. From her description there are a number of key phases to her life:

### Early childhood: Doing well at School and close Community links.

This participant had been born in a small mining village in Wales in the 1950's. Her mother was a social worker and her father was a safety officer in the Coal Board. Education appeared to be extremely important to her family network and the wider community. Starting primary school when she was 4 years old she had a successful early experience in school, culminating in passing the 11+ exam, a significant event for her family.

*'So we are a very small family but it was very important, education generally was very very important and passing the 11 plus was very important as well. It gave you opportunities, you know, education was seen as the opportunity for you to go into a profession.'*

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This sense of family pride and family and community support was the backdrop to her early life. Alongside this, there is the sense that she had to work very hard to achieve what she had in her early school life.

### Adolescence: Growing up with limited opportunities.

There were limited career opportunities in the area Jane lived in especially for woman. We may deduce from this that for children there were limited roles available for future identification, particularly for girls. Teaching, perhaps, was one easily identifiable role in the village for children. It was also a career choice which appeared to link to the professional status and values of her parents, particularly her mother. Education was an occupational area which that was held in high esteem:



and was seen as extremely important by wider family, and the local community, for later life chances.

There were other role models in her life, her uncle – her father’s brother- was a head teacher. He appeared to be particularly significant to her as she was growing up and remained so following her father’s death.

*‘Yes my dad worked for the NCB, the National Coal Board, and he was in safety and then went into personnel and my Dad’s brother went off to college and became a teacher and he married a teacher. They had two children. He then went off to get his first headship, he was very young, moved to Pembroke and got his headship there and then came back to Swansea for his second headship which was a much bigger school. Retired and then worked as an Advisor and an Inspector. But again you know there was that interest. My Dad died at 51, he had a fatal heart attack, but I am still in close contact with my dad’s brother and both of his children have gone into teaching as it happens but it was very much ‘oh you know you have done this you need to tell your uncle Jim about that’. Again everything revolved around education, very much. I suppose, not as a way out, but to have opportunities, I think that was the big thing to have different life chances.’*

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There is no sense of other career options or aspirations during this phase of her life and the focus remains on doing well at school.

### **Early Adulthood: Leaving home, teacher training and first experience of work.**

This participant went straight from school to teacher training. She worked in her holidays and spare time in Children Homes, a link with her mother’s occupation. This experience appeared to be a

valuable part of her formative professional experiences. But at times this would be traumatic for her: this incident was recalled in particular detail and appears to have been significant to her.

*'I was the only one there with support workers and there was a young boy who had been adopted and he was going out and a young girl who was obviously going to miss and him and was very hurt and wasn't going. And she had locked herself and the young lad in the young lad's bedroom and I had gone up there and opened the door and she threw a small pot of red paint that they used for painting model aeroplanes into my face and so I walked down the stairs with this crimson paint in my hair and all over my face, I think the unit workers thought that she had hurt me and that it was blood, and I was very shaken and I rang my mother and told her what had happened. The young girl was constantly going the around the outside of the building banging the windows with a stick and I rang my mother and said "what can I do, you know, come down" and she said 'no we are not going to come down. You really need to deal with this'. And I put the phone down feeling, that I just didn't know what to do but I did deal with it, I can't remember how I dealt with it but I dealt with the situation and my mother rang me back in about an hour and said "how's it going now" and I said 'oh fine' and she said 'you see had we come down and intervened and helped you, you wouldn't have gone back probably' because I was very scared, you know a really scary experience, and anyway I dealt with it and that was that. So my parents were always very supportive in terms of everything I have done really but in quite a hard way on that occasion (laughs). But I dealt with it and came through the other end and you know that was that.'*

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I felt, at the time, and later, that this incident is recalled in such detail because it is also somehow deeply relevant to her current circumstances specifically the schools she has worked and was currently working in where she also describes extreme behavior but is able to tolerate it perhaps due to these formative occupational experiences. A point I shall come back to shortly.

### **Leaving Wales for first teaching post**

Upon qualification she was recruited, along with other local newly qualified teachers, by a large Local Authority, outside of Wales, to work in an area of high deprivation, with significant social disadvantage. Recruitment difficulties in this area were the reason why newly qualifying teachers from Wales were targeted. Her earlier experience of family and of working in a Children Home supported her, and prepared her, for the potential culture shock she would experience as a newly qualified teacher when encountering the effects of environmental and early neglect.

*'But there were things that shocked me and things that you learn about life and about people and about parents of children. Which was good to know, it gives you a good foundation for going into areas in schools where there is social depravation because there is that understanding of you know when you have grown up in a very secure home, you can't imagine that parents would lie, you can't imagine that they would take their children to the social services offices on a Friday evening dressed in rags so that their children can be re-clothed and then want them back on the Tuesday. So I learnt lots of things about people and about parents really and the way that they can be so different and the lives that children have. But it was a very very good background I think.'*

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## **Marriage, travel and alternative employment.**

Following marriage, this participant travelled ostensibly with her new husband whose work with an oil company (perhaps another link with her father's occupation) took them abroad to the Middle East. Here she taught English as a second language. She found some of her experiences difficult, struggling with what she saw as the double standards she encountered; describing the alcoholism of middle class families which appeared to go unnoticed, compared with similar circumstances she had witnessed in her previous schools, this time with less wealthy parents, with different results.

On her return to the UK, she worked as a secretary. She recounted how she felt that teachers had few transferrable skills to find equivalent jobs in other industries. Here she recalls her first interview for a job outside of teaching with it a growing awareness and sobering realisation of the limitations of her professional training and experience in the wider occupational market.

*'Can you use a switchboard?' I said 'no'... 'Can you type?' I said 'no', 'Can you use a photocopier?' I said 'yes I can do that' (laughs) which is how I got the job in the oil company. I was their photocopying person but actually had never seen a photocopier quite so big.. .... I can remember being treated very much like a temp, somebody who really hasn't got any idea of what they are doing, you know, because you have got the job as a photo-copier the assumption by the office personnel, the people I worked with, was well actually that is all you are able to do. So yes that was an unusual feeling, of feeling de-skilled, you know as a teacher I couldn't do anything else really in terms of office work.'*

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## **A return to teaching: Re-skilling and progression to Head ship.**

Possibly because of the above experience, following her second child she returns to teaching, and commits herself. She was proactive in re-educating herself, conscious of the time she had taken out of the profession and concerned that she had been left behind by developments since she had left.

She appeared to accelerate quickly up the teaching hierarchy. There is some evidence here that she was supported by colleagues she knew early in her career who had now moved on to be head teachers.

Her specialism in Special Educational Needs gained her the position of Senior Advisor in the SEN Service. She then made a jump back into schools management, supported by a Diploma in Education Management, which was the culmination of studies while in her previous post. She then took on an acting deputy headship.

The management qualification and her specialist SEN status appears to have greatly accelerated her progression, perhaps because of the credibility it gave her in schools struggling with difficult and disturbed behaviour, which by their nature struggled to recruit senior staff.

*‘All of the schools had the same structure, there was no permanent head and there was no deputy and the children were in the schools at best badly behaved, at worst out of control. So it was setting up systems to deal with those types of behaviours for the staff and the children.’*

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For a period of four years, from this point, she took on a series of temporary advisory headships, working alongside staff in schools using the expertise she had garnered from her qualifications and experience. This gave her a broad experience of local schools and of managing change programs in difficult circumstances, which she would later draw upon as a head teacher.

Her first substantive headship was in a school in an area of high deprivation and with a high number of children with special needs. It seemed to be a shocking experience - but one that did not put her off working there.

*‘(the children) ..Displayed emotions that I had never really come across before in all of the schools I had been in. With the support of the Educational Psychologist who had never quite seen anything like it before in her life, with*

*examples of children head banging, rocking, they couldn't do anything, they couldn't read and they couldn't write. I started putting in place some of the elements of emotional literacy and building the self esteem of these children, teaching them that they could do things. I was sharing the post of leadership at this school, the person who I was sharing with moved on and I took on the acting headship because the school was going to amalgamate with a junior school. The decision was made not to amalgamate, a permanent headship became available and I decided after being in eight schools in a short period of time I would stay there.'*

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## **Thematic Analysis**

There is little hesitation, as this participant starts with a report about when she first became a teacher in 1977. In a short narrative she describes the school being in an area of high deprivation which necessitated a social worker and educational welfare officer being permanently attached. These opening sentences set the tone of the interview. They are followed by a series of reports outlining her trajectory from this school, to having children, moving and working abroad, to her return to teaching and what appears a quick rise to headship.

There was little deviation initially. The description followed a chronological line, with the central themes situated firmly on the axis suggested by the opening sentences: effective joint working with other professionals to support significantly disadvantaged and troubled children. This now becomes the core theme. An evaluation, later in her narrative, emphasises the point, confirming the importance of multi disciplinary working to her as head teacher, *'one of the most successful things was creating my own mini team around the child'*. This leads her to a narrative about the difficulties of the children and families and how she, when she first took over headship had to work with Social Services to identify children that should be on the Child Protection Register (there had been none identified previously).

A change of focus at this point: with a description of how she also used outside professionals to support her, in another way, this time with the *'adults'* at the school. Commenting here that they had developed their *'own systems of control'*. With some insight she understands this to be a response to their *'fear'* of the children.

She then elaborates relaying how staff also resorted to their own forms of discipline,

*'Ranging from sarcasm, blame, blame on families, with comments like "you were just like your brother was when he was here", and blaming the community.'*

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There is no evaluation as she continues in a more detailed manner recounting a particular incident: her first assembly as head teacher. It seems like a key moment. Here she describes a hundred pupils in the room with the whole staff team watching from the sidelines, waiting to see how she would *'control the baying dogs'*. This reveals perhaps why the staff team are fearful of the children and gives insight into the institutional pressures that she is managing.

The assembly seems to go well. She acknowledges that she would have felt nervous if she had known the staff would just stand back and watch.

And then an abrupt return to the question and a key evaluation:

*'I think your question was why I wanted to be a head teacher. I think it's because fundamentally I feel as if I can make a difference to children which is why I was in special needs. You know I always had high expectations of children and I have supported some children with a huge range of difficulties in main stream schools and its that belief that you can make a difference for them otherwise there is no point in being there, is there really?'*

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We can perhaps better understand the significance of this evaluation, by the positioning in her narrative: it appears a master signifier for her in role. When faced with difficult circumstances, it

appears these fundamental beliefs have the capacity to sustain her, hence the connection with the intimidating assembly above.

Here she makes further connection in the narrative recalling, for the first time, the importance of education to parents and community in her own childhood in South Wales. She acknowledges the effects this may have had on her and her own beliefs as teacher and head teacher, and follows this with a key reflection,

*‘And probably from my own background, growing up in Wales where education was incredibly important and still is and it was important for the whole family so everybody had expectations the children would do well and children, myself included, were rewarded by grandparents for being able to read a book, you know, to be able to play the piano, the achievements were very important and I suppose because that’s how I grew up it colours the way that you believe children grow up generally. So whatever their circumstances education is the one thing that will take them out of the situation that they are in.’*

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Summarizing the structure of the initial narrative this participant moves from a chronological report of her progression to a more detailed exploration of her own early experience. This appears to have supported the construction of a certain philosophy, which underpins her work, a belief that Education is a potential site of hope, for all children, including those most disadvantaged.

### **Summary and discussion**

This is essentially a story about the importance and the transformational qualities of education, both for our participant, throughout her career (she was completing a Masters in Education when I interviewed her) and the children she has taught and the schools she has managed. It is



accompanied with a clear and inherent belief about inclusion. This ethos appears to dominate her perspective. The personal and occupational manifestation of this is clearly articulated,

*'Only that I think in the job in terms of school improvement it is that determination that you are going to win for the children. And that's where, it's not a problem when you feel like that, when you are committed to making a difference for children it isn't a problem, and I suppose that's the difference between being in school improvement and being a head in another school maybe. ...And the things that take the time and sap your energy are not always the things that are important for the children. There are the staffing issues that are minor. The very very small things that are sapping, that are important to some people, but in the bigger scheme of things don't impact on children and I think it's very easy for heads to be sidelined by all of those issues that actually have got nothing to do with the children at all. And I think it's about bringing everybody back to look at the reasons why we are there. And we are a service aren't we? These families are our clients you know and we need to be giving a good service, because they are our future, the children.'*

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Frequently she gives vivid accounts of the struggles and difficulties of trying to achieve this, providing insight into the underlying social circumstances which has incubated the kinds of behaviour of children she has described above.

Close relationships with a variety of support services including Social Services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services had meant that she had reduced the numbers of exclusions in her school in her first year of headship from 7 to zero. This capacity for effective multi agency working and team work may have come, in part, from her varied lifestyle and career experience. She

also appeared to respond to challenge in an extremely proactive and open manner, actively managing the wider environment to bring resource to bear on her school.

*'The other thing that we do, I am a firm believer in the school being part of the community, is that we open up the school during the school closures for activities for the children. We will link in with the PCT and they are going to use the facilities twice a week for families in the locality, adults, who have been identified as having depression, obesity and that's also linked with Kingswood Health Centre, a health and fitness programme. So they come twice week to the school in the evenings, we have strong links with the women's' refuge who come along because we are a very secure site... We also have a karate club that operates there so we are doing more and more in terms of opening up the school facilities to the locality to try and raise the status of the school and the confidence of the parents.'*

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These descriptions of partnership working were a key point of difference from some of the other interviews, and, in her narrative, she spoke more of outside agencies than any other participant. She consciously recognised that her previous experience afforded her some benefit in relation to this,

*'The things that I have seen in schools that I have come across at all levels never cease to amaze me, they never cease to amaze. ... And I think that experience of seeing all of those things you can never replace, I think it just broadens your horizon of what schools are all about.'*

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I was struck by the way she had adapted herself. In the face of wider organizational change, her narrative was essentially evolutionary in nature. Intuitively, she appeared to have moved to position herself in developing areas of schools responsibilities. Catching the wave of change perhaps, she had

a skill mix, experience and outlook that matched the wider expectations now being placed in schools.

One can see this story as an example of the positive management of change at a personal and organizational level. The philosophical anchor I spoke of earlier appeared to be a source of strength and direction, enabling her to weather a frequently torrid climate. But I was left with the question...Why? And then later in the interview she makes a connection which she had not considered before.

*'And it is very exciting and is a huge adrenalin rush when you are going in to a situation and you have got so much to put right, I find it a huge challenge but a huge amount of personal satisfaction. And I suppose it addressed my needs, I may be of the need to want to fix things for children and I hadn't thought of that before until now when we started talking (laughs) but perhaps it is something that I need for myself because I do thoroughly enjoy what I do. I can't imagine doing anything else.'*

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There were moments she hinted at some of the tensions of the role; speaking of loneliness and of working long days. Her need for control was an undercurrent to her discourse.

*'I usually bring work home with me every evening so I tend to leave home in the morning about 6.45, I like to get in about 7.30 and that gives me an opportunity to touch base with my home school liaison worker who is also in early, and get ready for the day. I usually get home at about 6.15. We eat and then by about 8 I am usually doing a little bit of work. That's purely because I want to do that, I like to have a handle on things and I like to know what's going on across the school because the minute that I don't have my finger on everything, because I don't have a staff who come from a*

*background of professionalism and need to be checked up on, constantly, then I need to make sure I really know what is going on everywhere.'*

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This perhaps, the lack of a professionally experienced staff, is the other, more problematic side of having local labour in disadvantaged communities, requiring head teachers to manage in a proactive manner as described here. Her need for control was a source of stress and overwork for her, and personal support, when it was needed, appeared informally through trusted colleagues.

*'I have a tremendous school bursar who is really wonderful, she is very organised and without her support and not having a deputy then I would have really had difficulty but I am able to use her as my confidant as well, you know I can talk to her about things and she will help. She is brilliant but I do like to know what is going on, I like to have my finger on every area of what's going on, across the school that's why I bring a lot of things home with me.'*

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This participant was engaging, warm and friendly. She was very interested in my research and offered me more information or support if I needed it. I could see how this interest in others would, when translated to her work role, make for effective inter agency networking and co operation. Interestingly, at times, I felt slightly managed by her in a pleasant and subtle manner. I sensed that behind the warmth of her demeanour there was considerable toughness, focus and drive. I thought as I left that she would be hard to refuse or disagree with and suspected that she generally got what she wanted from staff and outside agencies.

I was struck during the interview that she continued to live in an area very close to where she worked: her own house (where the interview took place) was in a wealthier area on the hills above the school.

## Chapter 8

**Participant C: 'Peter' – Retired Head Teacher (Male 50s/ large City).**

### **Biographical Data Chronology**

1946: Older sister born

1950: Peter born into a family of teachers (mother working class background – her parents both Mill Workers.). Strong Baptist family.

1953: Mother returns to work – as a teacher.

1956: Catches bus (x2) home by self from school: remembers holidays 'off with mates all day'.

1957: Sister passes the 11+

1958: Peter sings in Church choir (Anglican Church)

1961: Peter fails the 11+

1961: Family move to new area and Peter starts new school.

1962: Peter passes the 11+

1966: Age 16 attends 6<sup>th</sup> form. Sings in Cathedral Choir and has music tuition.

1968: Attends College of Education.

1970: Starts teaching and becomes active in National Union of Teachers.

1981: Age 31 First Head Teacher post.

1987: Secondment to Local Committee for Education

1989: Working in Support Services (in service training) – refuses training to be OFSTED inspector.

1990: 2<sup>nd</sup> headship in small mining village.

1991: Proposed to NUT conference to 'boycott SATS.'

1997: 3<sup>rd</sup> headship in a large City primary school.

2005: Breakdown/Retirement

## Biographical Data Chronology

This participant, I shall call him Peter, worked in education for 24 years. He was the most experienced participant interviewed and had taken early retirement in 2005 following a 'breakdown' at work. His was the second longest of all interviews and from it we can distinguish some key phases of his life.

### Very Early childhood: Teaching and Religious Environment at Home

Peter was born in 1950, the younger of two children. His earliest memories were of his mother pushing him in his pram. Recalled here in some detail:

*'My mother was a good musician, she could play the piano. As a tiny child you know really small, being pushed around in a pushchair, one of my earliest recollections in life is my mother singing as we were going down the street. She would sing to me all the time and she says that I could sing before I could talk really, I used to sing in my cot in the morning. Songs that she had sung to me so you know I would be singing away... So singing came with speech.'*

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Peter had forgotten this childhood memory but interestingly recalled it at interview. The significance of this memory will become apparent later.

Both his parents were teachers and he describes his early childhood experience as an '*immersion*' in education. The consequences of this immersion were twofold: his parents frequently bringing work home with them and high expectations of him and his sister at school. His parent's social background was described as '*working class*' and his grandparents had both been mill workers. Both were referred to in this early narrative, as was his '*strong Baptist upbringing*'.

*'My mother had grown up in a working class family in Lancashire, her mother and father had both been mill workers in the cotton industry and her mother, my grandmother, had been determined that my mother would do well at*

*school and my mother got a scholarship to go to the local grammar school and then a scholarship to go to university otherwise she would never have got there and there was this very strong work ethic. Strong Baptist upbringing, my mother was brought up involved in the Baptist church and I think all of that was that you can succeed in life if you work hard enough and if I wasn't succeeding it was because I wasn't working hard enough, or not concentrating on the right things.'*

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In description, education appeared an extension of a religious work ethic and the associated family belief system, providing a vehicle for aspiration, for class progression, and, as the last comments suggests an index of his effort and commitment. He explains that his mother was rather 'hardnosed' about it all.

Peter had a stable family background. Following his birth, his mother returned to work. He was three years old. This was a significant recollection and he commented that this, his mothers return, was unusual at the time. He relays how very proud she was of the job she had with a local Girls Grammar school and in this brief extract he infers the consequences of this.

*'So there is a bit there that's all about my mother's work which was really important and it was for my father too and so I did a lot of fending for myself.'*

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### **Early Childhood: Freedom, independence and neglect.**

There was early in his childhood a theme of independence, self sufficiency and an underlying sense of neglect. These 'neglectful' circumstances appeared to be the direct result of his parent's teaching work and commitment to their careers – he comments they were 'single minded' in this pursuit. He describes how, age six, he would be catching two bus's home on his own because his mother would be working late at staff meetings.

His 'discovery' by a local Anglican minister, while playing on the street, resulted in him singing in the local choir, (extraordinary given his Baptist upbringing). Here he describes, in a colourful and vivid way, the actual moment.

*'And I was on the street playing when he came round and I said 'what are you doing?' and he said I am going round looking for people to join the church choir. I said 'I'll join'. Well of course my parents were strict Baptists and this was the local Anglican Church so I took this vicar, as he said I will have to see your parents. I said 'right come on' so I took this vicar home and said this guy wants people to sing in the church choir and I want to do it.'*

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He starts to attend the Anglican Church to sing in the choir while his parents continue to attend the Baptist church (twice on Sundays). His older sister (by four years) was seen by the family and teachers as the brighter of the two children and she was described as very successful both at school and later in adulthood.

A love of engineering appears to have developed during this phase of his life, describing himself as being '*fanatical about making things*' with his hands. In holidays and free time he would entertain himself through Meccano initially, then visiting scrap heaps to find electrical parts, and libraries to research how he may use them to make things.

*'So I was doing quite useful stuff and I was studying around whatever it was I was doing but it wasn't what I should have been doing, It wasn't part of the school curriculum and I wasn't doing my homework or whatever.'*

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He adds the reflection: '*so I was probably wasting time doing that.*' There is a sense here of deep contradiction. Something that was seen as '*useful*' when placed alongside the '*national curriculum*' is discredited.



## **Adolescence: Failure at school, recovery, and future career choice.**

Perhaps not following the 'curriculum' was the explanation why he failed the eleven plus exam.

Failure was viewed as catastrophic by his parents, and by Peter.

*'And I think that stems from my early life where the fact that I hadn't, that I had failed something, was a big issue for my parents and therefore a big issue for me and I suppose it has influenced my philosophy about not labelling children as failures early in life, and so it probably colours a lot of my feelings about what the government is doing at the moment.'*

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The family moved immediately to an area which had better schools and a higher pass rate. A year later he retook the exam and passed. However, he appeared to be powerfully affected by these events and it would later serve as a catalyst for his future academic and professional ascent. He was driven, one can surmise, by a fear of further failure.

*'But I had that real "I have got to succeed" and I particularly had that when I started working, wanting to be successful. And I think that stems from my early life where the fact that I hadn't, that I had failed something, (my 11 plus exam) was a big issue for my parents and therefore a big issue for me.'*

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The accounts of his late adolescence are more limited compared with his earlier childhood, perhaps reflecting his focus on school. At 16 years of age he sang in a prestigious Cathedral Choir. It appeared that his love of music and engineering had continued during his adolescent period. I was able to discern from his narrative that this was the moment in his life where the choice was made between engineering, music and teaching.

He chose teaching. The turning point being the advice given by his father who advocated the benefits of a 'secure job' at a time in the 1960's when a job for life appeared to hold value. Music, on the other hand, appeared a more risky option. This then was the moment a new life style beckoned

but, despite the earlier wish not to follow parents, this is what he does. Alternatives are abandoned and instead he follows his father and mother's career.

*'And I was really wanting to go to music college and I just remember my father saying you know "if that's what you want to do that's fine, but you need to think about what your prospects might be, you know, it's really competitive and so on and so forth and although you might not find teaching attractive particularly, it's very good. There are lots of good things about it and other people are out of work and are made redundant and don't have a pension, all those things are there in teaching". One of the ironies is (laughs) all this about the secure job for life went out of the window in the 80's. But anyway I think I had a lot of time for my father's sense really - I did listen to him. I think he was less sort of pushy than my mother so I think I thought well, you know. And I think he said well you know, look at my career and what I have done and you know it's been all right, you know this is a good thing to do, So I think in the end that was that, it wasn't a difficult conversation or anything he was just saying think about what you are going to do and he persuaded me I think.'*

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### **Early Adulthood: Teaching and the Trade Union**

Peter attends a College of Education. He describes little of his personal experience here but instead states he was heavily influence by the 'Plowdon Report' into Education. Upon qualifying, he takes up his first teaching post and at the same time he becomes active in the National Union of Teachers. There are few accounts of his early teaching career, but during this time he gets married and settles down with his wife, who is also a teacher.

Engineering and music disappear from his life, (they are no longer mentioned) and instead his biographical data is increasingly interspersed with references to wider political events and changing practices within education.

### **Headship: Success, distress and breakdown**

He rises up through the ranks of the education system first as teacher, and then as deputy head teacher, in recognition of his capabilities and determination. He takes on his first headship post age 31.

Later in his career another clear choice arose, remaining as a head teacher or training as an OFSTED inspector. Already heavily involved in the Trade Union movement, he chose to remain a head teacher, an ideological stance it seemed, against the increasing levels of centralised management that he felt was dictating Education in the classroom, this is increasingly a backdrop to his narrative.

At one point he proposed to the National Union Congress a boycott of SATS tests which initially was accepted by the Union. He becomes increasingly active and more senior within the Trade Union Movement and his dialogue, at this time, shows a deep political awareness of changes being proposed and implemented in schools.

Peter held three Headships in total; his second Headship was in a small mining village (perhaps a link with his grandparents and family background) and his last in an area with the highest deprivation in the city in which he worked. Violent crime and gun fire were not uncommon in the surrounding area.

*'My school was in a rough area of..... so if I tell you that in my last two years as a head I heard the gun going off on three fatal shootings in the area of my school, at the time I thought two of them were fireworks but I found out subsequently they actually were shots, because I know when the incidents happened, there was quite a lot of violence, so I had a nightmare about*

*somebody coming to school and shooting a member of staff, you know that sort of thing.'*

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His later preoccupations circulate around the changing nature of schools: a growing list of responsibilities for teachers and head teachers and the changing social context schools are expected to operate in.

Newer teachers and head teachers were referred to as having a different philosophy and approach. Increasingly, the work appeared arduous and conflicted. There was an unsettling and growing awareness of increasing responsibilities that were being devolved into schools. This appeared to increase his stress levels, giving rise to fears and nightmares about children dying in his school.

Later narrative appeared to detail an increasing separation and dislocation between Peter and the stated organizational philosophy. Wider descriptions of the profession recounted the death, sickness and suicides of peers, culminating in deeply moving and candid account of his own thoughts of suicide, depression and breakdown.

*'I was either at work, doing work at home (laughs) or thinking about work to the extent that I was thinking about it all the time, and worrying about it. And I started to worry about things that might go wrong. I had had a long time as a head so I had being used to, you know, the responsibilities that you have and I had not worried too much about things going wrong, but I started to get really paranoid I suppose almost about the things that could happen that would be bad. You know a child having an accident at school and dying, you know, that's always the case, you can be a head for donkeys years and that's always there but suddenly I used to worry about it. I would wake up in the middle of the night thinking about work, all my dreams were nightmares and they were all about work. And if I was on holiday even abroad I would be thinking about work all the time. I would be taking work with me, my laptop,*

*I would be working on my holidays, if I was on the beach (laughs) on holiday I would still be thinking about work and I became ill really as a result of all of that. Then suddenly I found myself at work for the last month or two that I was at work I couldn't make a decision, trivial, trivial decisions (laughs) I couldn't make any. I suddenly couldn't relate to people and I had always been very good at that, I would lose my temper which I had never done, you know with children, with parents. I would find myself wandering around the school, I wouldn't know what I was doing where I was going, I would occupy my time doing trivial things when there were important things that needed doing, and I suppose after being like that for well over a month, probably two months, I just knew that I wasn't safe anymore. I had a really bad conflict with a parent one day and I think that was what really made me think, you know, you are not fit to be here. It took me a long time to come to that conclusion, this creeps up on you, you don't necessarily know, and so I was so bad that day I came away from school in the middle of the day thinking I will just have some time off, I need some time off (laughs) and I never went back.'*

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He chose to retire, after a Counsellor had commented that he appeared to be in 'the wrong job'. He immediately recognised she was right. He had worked in Education as a teacher and head teacher for his entire professional life. To this day Peter struggles to walk past a school. He has not been able to enter one since he left.

### **Life after Headship**

Since this time he has used his experience to good effect; through lecturing and public speaking he has raised awareness of the issues that face teachers and head teachers through speaking candidly about his own experiences. His son has just qualified as a teacher.

## Thematic Analysis

Peter starts his narrative with the statement

*'OK, I grew up in a family of teachers (laughs) both my parents were teachers er, so I was very used to the conversation over meal times every evening being my parents talking about their work, so I knew a lot about teaching (laughs) and what it involved. Er, I didn't particularly intend originally to follow my parents, you know there were other things that I was interested in, I was very interested in engineering, the subjects I was good at at school were the sciences, maths in particular, both my parents were math teachers so that probably explains why.'*

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The flow of his narrative, after a hesitation, ('Er') changes direction, with an evaluation: *'I did not always want to follow my parents'*. He then goes on to explain that his final decision to become a teacher was heavily influenced by his father's advice.

Occupational choice is a key underlying theme, which resurfaces throughout the narrative. He repeats on three separate occasions during the interview that he had not had the intention to be a head teacher – *'I hadn't thought at that stage that I might end up as a head teacher'- 'I hadn't elected to be a head teacher'- 'in fact there was a part of me that didn't want to be a head (laughs).'*

A series of rather distant reports describe being influenced by the philosophy behind the 'Plowden Report', advocating that *'children learn through discovery'*. Further comments about the current systems of education appear to contrast deeply with this philosophy and how he describes his early experiences as a teacher.

His opposition to changes in Education will develop into the core theme of the narrative, heralded with the comment that when he first became head teacher, *'Local Authority advisors really were advisors'*. He repeatedly draws comparison with the current educational system which he appears deeply critical of, describing contemporary advisors as the *'thought police'*.

A series of reports detail growing concerns about the profession alongside his rapid professional progression, and increasing activity in the Trade Union movement. These two aspects of his personal experience are interwoven and threaded through an increasingly detailed political narrative which portrays this participant as being strongly opposed to government policy and changing educational practice.

Longer and more detailed reports continue to describe the changes in the profession and his own increasing dislocation: culminating in a description of his refusal to be an OFSTED inspector and an evaluation about being *'opposed to the new systems of prescription'*.

*'So I was always, even from about 1992 onwards, you know I felt myself in conflict with a lot of what I was being asked to do. And I suppose that doesn't help because if you are constantly doing something that you don't really like or you try to find ways of avoiding (laughs) doing what is required of you then that causes some conflict and tensions which, you know, isn't particularly good for your state of mind. That gradually I think became more and more acute so when I moved to my final headship, you know, I really did have a problem with the pace of change, the fact that nothing was properly evaluated, you know we would be told to work in a particular way and only to be told two years later to do something different and kind of, I didn't like the culture which was a certain methodology.'*

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Two evaluations set the scene for the conclusion of the narrative. The first is about 'all' head teachers having to bottle *'everything up'* and the second is about stress and illness which is cited here.

*'Head teachers and teachers respond to additional pressures often by working harder. They are reluctant to take a break when the early symptoms of illness*

*appear. They feel guilty if they do take time off and so they push and push and push themselves until a point when they do have a real serious breakdown.'*

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He goes on to consider the effects of stress on head teachers in relation to staff and children and the management of schools before describing in detail his own emotional breakdown in school.

Later, at the end he recalls having considered suicide himself, and then the moment he chose to retire. He recalls the conversation with a mental health nurse/therapist.

*'And these were the words that really (pause).....she said 'well I think you are in the wrong job' and actually that really made me think. I then spent a lot of time talking to the other one I was seeing individually about it and eventually just made the decision I was going to leave teaching. And it was like, whoosh, amazing the difference having made that decision. I didn't know what was going to happen to me, I didn't know if I was going to get a pension, I didn't know how I was going to live financially, but I made that decision and the difference it made to me was just huge. Talk to my family about it. Suddenly I could go out, I could see people again, I was still anxious about school and going near school and so on but I just was a completely different person.'*

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So here at the last we return to the question of choice of profession. Perhaps this illuminates the significance of his hesitant opening comments drawing our attention back to the other pathways he could have taken but did not follow.

## **Discussion**

Early academic failure appeared to add impetus to Peter's drive for success. He did not, it seemed, want to experience failure again, and in his narrative did not mention *'failing'* at anything after this,



until his final headship. As a young teacher he rose quickly within the school and the Trade Union hierarchy (this appeared to link to the values of his grandparents).

The failure of the eleven plus appeared a key moment in his life, and he refers to it as crystallising aspects of his philosophy in education. It also felt like the moment his early childhood came to an end. The freedom he had experienced as a young child appears to vanish in his adolescence: there are fewer, if any, reports of his teenage years until he has to make a choice of which professional pathway he will choose.

This participant's narrative provided, as the oldest and most experienced participant interviewed, an index of change in the profession across three decades, cataloguing the changing nature of schools, and the role head teachers.

The occupation he had originally chosen because it represented a safe (and possibly dull) option with 'prospects', was changing into something far from familiar. It demanded a significant philosophical transition and a renegotiation of deeply held beliefs and the emotional tolerances required. Note how he starts this passage:

*'Well I had grown up in a philosophy that said actually children learn in lots of different ways and under the Plowden kind of approach, more than half of what children learn is not learnt in lessons, in formal lessons, it's learnt at home, it's learnt out of school, it's learnt from their peers and all of this was really, you know against that philosophy so if a child was having difficulty learning it was because the teaching was bad or this child needed more teaching so they needed to come to a breakfast club, or an afterschool lesson, or holiday sessions, cramming things and you know I strongly disagreed because my view was children need time to play, if you put too much pressure on them it de-motivates them, so I was in conflict, big time (laughs).'*

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I think this is in part a reference to his childhood, (not just his professional 'growing up') which very much resonated with this philosophy. I suspect that from age eleven onwards his education was far more formal than had experienced previously. Therefore the tension expressed as a political and philosophical schism may also be a description of a personal shift that occurred between childhood and adolescence.

Towards the end he reflects on and evaluates his narrative, in a way that goes to the heart of his story - about where and how does learning take place?

*'So there you go, yes I had forgotten about all of that (laughs) about singing in my pram and stuff. Yea, so I mean I suppose all of this also reinforces a view that role models in your life are really important and you are big time influenced by how your parents behave and how your friends behave and so on and those things have a much bigger impact on your life than teachers generally do.'*

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Changing educational, political, and societal templates had left him at sea with his own deeply held views arising from, not just his own childhood, but the family and society in which they were established.

I was struck by the way the narrative was interspersed with historical and philosophical comparisons related to the participant's position within teaching as it changed throughout his career. Increasingly, the government was criticised for the pressures they placed on teachers and head teachers. The narrative referred to an increasing workload but also, alongside this, an increasing separation in philosophy between the participant's view of education and what he was being required to do within governmental policy. This appeared to represent a battle over ideology which, although not consciously expressed, appeared to link very much to his ideas about and own experience of childhood.

Early on he had followed his parent's profession, and failed to move beyond their embargoes. I wondered how much his acquiescence and the sacrifice of alternatives at 16, to his father's '*good sense*', were behind his ideological struggle with the government. The argument, as it were, that he did not have in adolescence, with his parents appeared to have been displaced into his future relationships with authority.

His high profile trade union activities appeared to be a mixed blessing for him. While Trade Unionism appeared to serve as key point of identification, providing support and a vehicle for his philosophical and political beliefs it maintained him in a rather oppositional and concrete position, to the rapidly changing professional landscape he depicts in his narrative. And despite his successes, from another perspective, it retains identification with the 'underdog' - again perhaps related to his own early experiences.

Peter's style of management appeared to be paternalistic and caring. As such he appeared to absorb considerable stress himself rather than pass it on to staff. It was an approach that did not seem to have been modified or affected by wider changes, except in the workload required of the role holder.

In BNIM focus groups, possible future breakdown was identified as an outcome from his childhood chronology. In this way the disaster of academic failure age eleven and the decisions not to carry on with engineering or music were significant forks which appeared to be pivotal in prophesying future events.

It seemed to be a story of lost hope. Following the interview I had felt numb and exhausted. On the long drive home I had felt emotionally flattened. I turned on the voice recorder but could not articulate a single thought. Not one word. This numbness I felt linked to an overarching sense of despondency, which despite the articulate renderings of the participant had permeated the interview. It was a sad and deeply moving story, but not a tragic one. Enough of the participants self respect and dignity survive to save it from this fate.

## Chapter 9

### Participant D: 'Angela' Head Teacher Age 30: Large city Primary School

#### Biographical Data Chronology

Maternal Grandfather worked in a factory in a northern town.

Angela's mother was the first person to get a degree in family – becomes social worker

Marries father also Social Worker

**1976:** Angela born (first and only child)

**1987:** Attends selective girls secondary school

Keen Musician

**1994:** Passes 10 A's at O level and 3 A's and a B at A level – disappointed about the B.

**1994:** Applies twice to Oxford University – but fails on both occasions to secure a place.

**1994:** Went to Durham University leaving within the first year, and then transfers to another University.

Worked as a Nanny in holiday periods

**1998:** Graduated with 1<sup>st</sup> in Philosophy

**1999:** Teacher Training

**2000:** First teaching post in Large City - 90 % Arabic speaking

**2002:** Applied and accepted Fast Track Program

**2002:** 2<sup>nd</sup> (fast track) teaching post

**2004:** Became assistant head teacher

**2005:** Became deputy head teacher.

Starts singing in Gospel Choir

**2005:** Maternal Grandfather dies.

**2006:** First (and current) headship post.

**2006:** Parents separate.

## Biographical Data Chronology

Angela, the next participant, had been part of a fast track leadership program which saw her take up the role of head teacher at the age of 29. She was the youngest of those interviewed and the youngest at the point of becoming a head teacher.

### Angela's Early Life

Angela was born in 1976. Her parents were both social workers, her mother holding a more senior position than her father. This may have been a relevant identification for her later management aspirations. She describes a positive family experience and feels 'lucky'. No doubt, in part, this is related to the chronic difficulties of the children with whom she would have been familiar through her parent's occupations.

Linked to this and early in her life there is a clear identification with her father, who she deeply admires because of his involvement in the Kimberley Carlisle Inquiry. She recounted, as a child, watching television reports and being proud of him. It appears that this is not so much because of the publicity or because he is 'successful' in his career. Instead, she appreciates, even at a young age, the importance and seriousness of his work and the 'fastidious' way he goes about it. She was seven years old at the time, and the 'cruelty' involved in the case was distressing to her and had a significant impact. Perhaps because of this, she sees her parent's professions as being linked to children who suffer.

As a consequence of her parent's backgrounds in her formative years she describes being surrounded by social workers and teachers, and comes into contact with 'social' and 'socialist' values and the 'social mindedness side of the world'. Ideas about 'making a difference' appear to have germinated in this early period of her life.

*'Both my parents worked in social work as well, mum particularly, in fostering and adoption and my Dad more with adolescents. So there was always lots of emphasis on that really, it was my upbringing. So there was the social minded side of the world, surrounded by lots of social workers and teachers*

*and stuff while I was growing up I suppose. So definitely core motivation about people and doing something positive and doing something. Don't want to sound trite, but to make a difference and all of that.'*

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Her Grandfather appears to be a key figure in her early life. He worked in a factory in a northern town and, she recalls, was very committed to education, actively encouraging her mother to attend university (the first member of the family to do so).

This good family experience gave her confidence and an orientation to social values, which would later sustain her. She felt positive about herself as a result. The appreciation of her own childhood allowed her to recognise that she could, because of this, have something positive to offer later in her life.

### **Adolescence: Success, failure and a difficult transition.**

Angela attended a selective girl's school and had done well academically, achieving 10 A's at GCSE and four 'A' levels, 3 A's and a B. She found this to be a quite normal pattern of results but it is also considered by her, and - within the 'academic elitism' of her school, as something of a failure:

*'I got 10 A grade GCSE's and for A levels, 3 A's and a B. And the first thing my head of house said to me when I got my A level results was, "Oh, what a shame about the B" (laughs). That was literally the first bit of feedback, I remember that (laughs). I was predicted an A and I got a B in French. It was like, "Oh god the world's gonna end you know?"'*

*'I can remember that particular moment, I was standing in the car park of the school and I remember Mrs. xxxxl coming over and opening them and saying 'oh - B for French'*

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There appeared a level of shame, and a sense that she had let people (notably her parents and grandparents) down because of this and two subsequent unsuccessful attempts to get to Oxford

University. She started at one University, then transferred back to another closer to her parents (this may have represented another knock to her confidence) from which she achieved a first in Philosophy.

Her original idea had been to pursue music therapy as a specialist qualification. Her experiences in school and the life experience required to follow a therapeutic pathway led her to lose interest in this career (it does not re-emerge until the end of the interview, where music reappears as a major part of her private life). Instead, perhaps, because of commitment to her original motivation, she decides to refuse the academic or city opportunities that her peers had followed and which would have been available to her.

She did not appear to be unduly influenced by either her parents or grandparents in relation to her career choice. There was no mention that they had tried to influence her and this seemed to be a positive factor. There was a very moving account of finding her grandfathers photo album after he died, conveying both his pride in her achievements and the fundamental importance of education and socialism in the family.

*'Well when I graduated he couldn't actually come down but after he died actually I found his photo album and he just had a special photo album of me graduating from LSE. It was funny because he had lots of things but this whole album and it was such a big thing. You know and also because of LSE historic left wing credentials. Obviously, well not obviously I don't know how much you know about LSE it's not very left wing any more (laughs) highway to the city. So for him it was a symbol of probably everything he stood for really. Because I did philosophy and he was a thinker and it hit all his buttons probably. And I have still got it, this photo album, it is just full, it is just loads of pictures of like nothing particular, obviously every single picture anyone took he kind of had them all there of just everybody, all my friends, just totally random, but just the significance of it. I remember feeling that very much.'*

While Education was not her first choice of career, it was one that she felt allowed her to intervene with children at an early stage, rather than what she saw as the more chronic longer term problems presented by her parents' clients. It was also a choice which allowed her to continue with parental vocation, without having to be so close to the awful side of it.

She decides on a career in teaching, against the advice of her professor, who considered it a waste of her intellect.

*'I then went back and said, "Can you write me a reference because I am applying to become a primary school teacher?" At which point my professor famously now said to me, "You are wasting your brain going into primary education" (laughs).'*

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This may represent the wider professional view of teaching as having a somewhat 'second string' professional status; where apparently more successful peers moved onto be Solicitors, Barristers, Doctors or, as in this participants case, onto making '*lots of money in the City*'. For her, teaching is not chosen because other options are blocked, as she has capabilities which would have given her significant freedom in occupational choice. Later, when reflecting on the '*famous*' professor's comments, she recognises her own, and possibly others, anxieties about her decision,

*'Yea I was gobsmacked. I was so shocked and upset because it reinforced a fear I suppose that I did have in a way and that I think probably other people had and possibly even my parents. They never expressed it but possibly they did think.... gosh this wonderful, bright daughter who they were so proud of going to be a primary school teacher which any Tom, Dick and Harry in a way, you know, can do. I don't know if everybody really thought that, but it kind of articulated an anxiety that was possibly lurking somewhere.'*

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### **The fast track to Headship.**

Her peers at university were mentioned frequently and many did go onto work in the city. Although she did not want to follow them, her motivation for teaching remains slightly hazy. These young high flyers appeared to be a source of identification for her.

Within eighteen months of starting teaching she already felt she could do better than her then head teacher. Her first class degree may well have given her assurances and confidence about her abilities, which were already emerging. She recognises a level of arrogance in these assumptions, but it seems that she felt that this maybe a necessary component in being an effective manager, giving her self confidence and assurance to succeed.

*'Well, to be totally honest I was inspired by the first head teacher I worked for and I thought, oh yes I can see myself doing that. And then in the second year I was watching this woman doing things and analysing it all and thinking, OK why was that such a disaster? What did she do, what did she not do etc? And I actually felt, arrogantly but possibly truly, that I could have been doing a better job. Right then that day, even though I had only been doing teaching for 18 months, I just couldn't bear working for her because she was just, you know, things that were just intuitive to me about how you would do things or not do things. I couldn't bear watching, it was like a car crash. So I thought, OK I want to do that and I am gonna do it a lot better than her (laughs). Seems rather arrogant but you have to have a bit of arrogance to do a leadership job like this. I mean arrogance is a nasty manifestation, but confidence in your ability..... because otherwise if you are doubting yourself all the time you couldn't function when you are running a complex organisation such as a school. So that's when I decided, I already knew.'*

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There was evidence of her being mentored by the two head teachers who had been very important to her. The second appeared a very positive role model for her aspirations and provided considerable support, which is warmly recounted. There was also a rather bad example of headship from her NQT days, which also provided a lesson about the importance of boundaries.

The aspiration to be a head teacher may have been some justification for her choice of a lower status profession, and an expression of latent ambition, giving her a sense of status and prestige in spite of her professor's comments. Not surprisingly, she grabs the opportunity presented by the fast track program.

*'Yeah, well the minute I heard about fast track I was totally and utterly sold on it. It sounded brilliant and totally up my street. I can remember sitting in my classroom on the internet doing a self assessment questionnaire you could do about this fast track thing, and I remember doing that and just by the pitch of the questions, yeah too bloody right this is for me, this is it. Already by then I had been thinking about leadership and thinking, yes this suits me. I remember feeling really excited and thinking this is great and then the assessment centre, used to be residential two days, really full on, six different tasks and then you had to evaluate them all yourself. Do a written evaluation of each one. It was quite an intensive assessment centre and I remember then just the sort of people who were there, and the pitch of it I was like... oh yes this is proper. Because some of the initial teacher training isn't that brilliant (laughs). So I suppose it was kind of countering 'you are wasting your brain' anxiety or you know it's all about sharpening pencils and you know that kind of thing. And actually, funnily enough, one of the things in a purely sort of totally superficial kind of way, it gave me a way of explaining to people. Who springs to mind my friend in LSE who is working for Goldman Sacs you know. It gave me away of articulating something about what I was doing.*

*That it wasn't just about teaching little kids and A,B,C ...it was kind of a hook on a way of explaining it which I really liked. I suppose in a way it is a status thing, not that I am massively into that because I am not, I suppose if you feel in a bit of a corner it is a defence thing isn't it. So it was a sort of way of explaining what I was doing, how I saw it.'*

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After four years of qualifying as a teacher she becomes assistant head teacher, then after five years she takes on a deputy headship and then, finally, her first headship six years after qualifying at the age of 29. Here's the moment she is offered and accepts the job.

*'And little me, standing there in this sort of half empty funny little room with the power. Oh god it sounds really.....it was kind of like, I knew I had this to give, like this energy and commitment and I knew whichever school I decided to go to, that they would get something of me. That was really special because I have special things to give and I feel that. So it was kind of ...is this the place, the place that is going to have me for a while? Sounds really awful and terribly.....but that's how I felt but it does sound very.....but I do feel very blessed I have had lots of blessings in my life and I have a lot to give. And I am passionate about it and very energetic and I am competitive and of course I want to get bloody fantastic OFSTED report and great SATS results because it reflects on me as well. So I have got that 'well come on we have got to bloody well do this' together. So it was like, is this the place where this will happen? And something made me say yes. It is, let's do it. And I knew when they came to get me and I walked back down the stairs, because they said, "Do you want to stay while we make our decision?" And I obviously said yes. The other person had left, so they walked me back across the hall and down the stairs to this other scummy room, I*

*remember the chair. He was this slightly dippy kind of bloke, older bloke. He said, 'Well done, we would like to offer you the job.' And I really remember that and he said would you like to accept it and I said yes and shook hands and it was like, that's that then. And that night I obviously told everyone. My parents came up and boyfriend and best friend and whoever else and we went for lovely champagne at one of my favourite places and it was all lovely la, la, la. But my parents hadn't been here so it was in November, it was like pissing with rain, pitch black at 10 at night and it was like, come on I'll take you and show you the school (laughs). And they drove through the estate under the flats, pulled up outside the prison wire, you know and they were kind of like 'oh it's lovely darling' (laughs). It was kind of after the exhilaration and oh wow and stuff and what a major achievement bla bla bla, this is the real Macoy. This is really hard core.'*

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She struggles to put things into words here, appearing slightly embarrassed, as she contemplates the success of her achievement. Possibly, this hesitancy links to the culture of success she has experienced in University and school which is translated into something she can feel more comfortable with. She recognizes that she has been given much and can feel good about giving it back. Then she describes the reality of taking her parents to a rather grim looking school. However the social commitment is also a bond with them which is highlighted throughout her discourse.

### **Thematic Analysis**

Angela's starts by complementing me on the question, and moves on to report how she did not always want to be a teacher. It had not been her first choice career, she tells me she only settled on it after she had left University. Much of her early narrative revolves around status.

*'It has got easier. Perhaps, needless to say, as I have had a very accelerated career in education and so on. So suddenly when you are a Deputy Head or a*

*Head it is a slightly different kettle of fish in talking to people than being a primary school teacher, which has quite negative connotations in some way..... in intellectual snobbery terms, I have found.'*

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The low status perception of primary school teaching, her First degree at a good university and her professor's 'famous' and rather disparaging comments are reported alongside the success of peers, some of who are completing their PhD at Harvard while others are making money in the city.

Continuing the theme of status, she recounts in a reflective and predictable way how it has got easier for her as she has progressed in her career. The language is very managerialist in formation, describing how she learnt about '*process and the importance of process in how you do things*' from her mentors. This managerialist discourse is continued in subsequent narrative, with comments about '*emotional intelligence*', '*behaviour management*' and '*empowering people*'. This is underpinned by an evaluation that '*success*' is dependent on your '*credibility*' with the children, although a later comment about OSTED and SATS suggests that this is not the only criteria she is using.

She refers to her own arrogance but concludes that it is a quality that is needed as a head teacher.

At this point, much of the narrative in long stretches is rather self regarding as she describes her career acceleration to headship alongside a rather elitist perspective ('*get the bright people in*') of one of the schools who supported her on the Fast Track Program. However, she is appreciative of the support she has been given within the schools system.

When she attains headship she reports, somewhat hesitantly, of enjoying the power,

*'One of the most wonderful things about being a head is that you have so much autonomy. I couldn't believe it when I first started. I was kind of like 'right so who's going to tell me what to do?' (laughs) and it was just, do what you like in so many respects and that's just awesome.'*

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This theme of power (and status) continues. She likes it because you have the power to ‘do good’ but there is a sense that it is enjoyed because it is seen as important.

We then see the other side of headship, or a ‘baptism of fire’ as she describes it. She found herself managing an inner city school with significant challenges and difficulties, including the discovery of the ‘corrupt practices’ of the previous head teacher. She is disparaging here of the previous head and uses these reports to legitimise her own work – ‘so much work to do’ – and abilities as head teacher.

More preoccupations with power at this point in her narrative centre on the scale of impact it afforded her and how, within this expansion, she was particularly concerned by how you could maintain quality. She felt that good leadership was fundamental to successful outcomes for children.

*‘I just think being a Head Teacher is such an amazing privilege of a job because you are this person in the community and sometimes you wear it heavy. If I’m just a bit worn out or wobbly or whatever and you think “Oh, I don’t want to be this person, I just want to be Liz”. But you have all this power, sounds funny, but you have all this power that you can do good with and by being a Head Teacher if you say thank you to somebody or you say well done to them or whatever that means so much, it means much more that Liz saying well done. You can multiply that by everything from staff to parents to people. You write a letter on behalf of a family to housing to support their housing application, it means something because you are the Head Teacher and it’s wonderful to have that and to be able to use it in such a productive way I suppose. And it’s like yesterday, I am a bit advocate of the school and I am forever schmoozing people and networking and you know getting our name out there and getting the press interested, because I just think it is wonderful for the children and the families to see.’*

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This broader focus continues again almost predictably from her narrative and she then speaks in more detail of '*schmoozing*' people she met from the city and the corporate sector, successfully engaging a local business in spending a day a year in the school, contributing money as well as time. Alongside this, she describes being heavily involved with other local school and community forums and networks. Angela reflects that headship is a public plinth and recognises through recounted experience that head teachers could also be the target for '*positive*' ('crushes') as well as '*negative projections*'. She then reports a vitriolic and anonymous letter campaign against her in detail – but in a rather distant and analytical manner – before blaming it on the previous head teacher.

Towards the end of her narrative she realises she has not mentioned her private life, concluding it took '*quite a battering*' when she became a head teacher. She reports at this point that within the first week of her taking up the post her parents split up after 35 years of marriage. And then continues with how she manages her work life balance describing her life outside; boyfriend, gospel choir, classical singing (with a brief detour about her future prospects of having children) before returning to draw comparisons, interestingly and predictably from her previous discourse, between headship and corporate sector business management. Here she draws the line between the social and moral responsibilities of headship and an output model of business, where it does not matter if you are a '*total bastard*' if you get results.

She then closes by complementing me for letting her talk.

## **Discussion**

Angela felt like a modern example of contemporary public sector management in action. She appeared to be a very competent head teacher. Social and ideological traditions embedded in her family background were embodied in a style of business or corporate management.

There was largely an acceptance of the task definitions of the modern school system – the instruments of inspection and audit measurements etc - and she appeared to use this as a criterion for success, with no regret expressed about the loss of earlier approaches. Her narrative was full of modern educational management speak, suggestive of a 'New Labour' ideology and approach to

leadership combined with a traditional idea of what she felt schools could and should provide for children. This appeared to represent to her the social and moral responsibility of headship. Her discourse provided a strong sense of the influences that had shaped her leadership approach.

The values of her family were a key touchstone for her. At an ideologically uncomfortable moment, when she speaks of not going on strike with other teachers, she returns to the values of her family and the moral basis for her work, describing how being a head teacher allows her to fulfil their ideals.

Her class positioning is interesting. In the interview she avoids the identification with the prosperous, somewhat materialist conservatives she describes as working for as a nanny (though she also likes them as she has remained in contact). But she is also not like her parents in a perhaps more oppositional position, working for the less well off in society. What emerges is something again more 'New Labour', more upwardly mobile, a belief in opportunity for all rather than her parents' identifications with the underdog or deprived groups.

Her discourse showed an awareness of emotional intelligence, which she felt was essential for effective management in schools, but she identifies this as an element of practice and understanding frequently lacking in her colleagues and peers.

*'She didn't really have credibility because the kids didn't really respect her, you know. Her behaviour management was not very good; she didn't have emotional capacity to make relationships basically. She was lacking in emotional maturity or ability really. She didn't empower people, she tried to do things all herself, she would say she would do things and wouldn't be able to do them so all sorts of classic traps (laughs) to fall into.'*

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This perspective, which frequently emerges in her narrative, may represent an aspect of contemporary management thinking which she has adopted. It may also be linked to her parent's professional background and training or possibly her ongoing support from an Executive Coach. She



felt as a leader she had an important role in developing new staff, like she had been supported in her own development. This appeared to fit with her managerial and entrepreneurial abilities as a way of getting the best out of people.

Work life balance was a later preoccupation of the interview and she spoke of her concerns about her as yet unborn and 'unconceived' child. She felt that it was difficult for head teachers to have children, recognising that her commitment to work could, and had, early on overshadowed her personal life. Her new partner was also a head teacher. This appeared to be a parallel with her parent's relationship and shared professional status. This connection, between her personal life and parent's separation, suggested this represented a concern for her - she wondered whether a relationship between two head teachers would provide enough space for raising children.

Angela proactively developed her personal life and appeared to be currently managing her work life balance well. She made a point of travelling during holidays (enjoying the fruits her salary allowed) and not working weekends as she perceived many of her peers did. She also appeared to use her city friends as a barometer or reality check, describing how she once felt guilty at getting in late at 8.10 and then realising that, in the outside world of her friends, getting in late meant 10.00 a.m. Again her social and professional networks and the awareness it supported of the wider environment benefited her in many ways.

Angela maintained her interest in music and continued to sing in a gospel choir, which appeared very important to her. She also continued to attend the gym on a regular basis.

There was a limited recognition that not everyone was like her. Few would have the intellectual capabilities to be as successful and dynamic as her in the role - an echo perhaps of her recounted response to her qualifications at school which, as I have already commented on, she had also considered the norm.

*'And there are loads and loads of bright wonderful Heads, I have got some wonderful colleagues who are doing wonderful things in schools you know. And I have to say there are a lot of my colleagues when I go to xxxxxxxxxx's*

*Headship meetings, a lot of it is very, very low level stuff. That is not people being able to get a perspective beyond the immediate of that thing about scale, there is not sort of the capacity frankly.'*

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The 'fast track' program, designed to offer 'bright young things' like her a comparable professional pathway and a socially minded alternative to high status occupations, is illuminated by this participants' story. It may represent something of the new group of aspirant teachers who are being drawn into the profession by the fast track program.

It seemed that a number of outcomes were possible for this participant, marriage and child birth, continued headship within this school or another (there was a suggestion that other schools had already shown interest in 'poaching' her) or a more advisory, strategic or even political role in an organization.

I felt that I was slightly schmoozed or seduced myself - in the last minutes being checked out for what I may be able to offer the school – it was very hard not to like her. My overall impression was that this was someone who was doing well, who appeared to enjoy their role and was able to manage the interview well with me in an open and reflective way. She was a tremendously impressive and exceptionally capable individual and I left the interview feeling buoyed by her inspiration, enthusiasm and energy.

## **Chapter 10**

### **Participant E: Suzanne Head Teacher female age 33 /Village School.**

#### **Biographic Data Chronology**

**1977:** Suzanne born.

**1977:** Adopted – 6 weeks old.

**1977:** At 12 weeks old has hernia operation.

**1980:** Diagnosed rheumatoid arthritis and is hospitalised for some months.

**1982:** Starts Independent Primary School.

**1993:** Achieves 10 GCSE O levels

**1994:** Moved to Spain with parents (international School). Returned to England and boarded at friends house (2 years).

**1995:** Achieves 3 A levels

**1996:** Studies to be a teacher.

**1998:** Meets future partner

**2000:** 1<sup>st</sup> School teaching post.

**2004:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Teaching post.

**2006:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Teaching post (small village school).

**2007:** 1<sup>st</sup> Headship (30 years old).

**2008:** Had baby – 1 year's maternity leave.

## Biographical Data Chronology

Suzanne was a young woman in her early thirties who had been a head teacher for just over one year when I met her: she was the least experienced of the participants in a headship role.

### Early Childhood: Adoption, Hospitalization, and Painful Struggle.

Suzanne had a difficult early life. She was adopted 6 weeks after birth. Her adoptive parents were described as being *'in the public eye'*, but she at no point states what they actually did – perhaps it was so public that she could not speak of it. In practice, her parents' *'public profession'* meant that for much of her early life she was brought up by a nanny. At 12 weeks old she underwent a hernia operation but continued to have medical difficulties, being diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis at the age of 3. Her early life was punctuated with long stays in hospital and this disrupted her early schooling at an independent primary school.

Suzanne's adoptive brother and sister attended boarding school but because of her health problems she was unable to follow them. Her experience of school was not a positive one; she did not feel supported by the private school she initially attended, recounting how she was berated for being late for lessons after struggling to climb flights of stairs to get to classrooms while wearing her callipers. She was acutely aware of her difference to her peers both through her, adoption, physical disability and her dyslexia (she speaks of the weekly humiliation of the spelling test in her first years of school before it was diagnosed).

Through these recounted childhood experiences she articulated a deep sense of hurt and shame, but it seemed because of or in spite of this, she presents herself in a purposeful and determined manner. In a considered and reflective way, she recounts time and again how these early experiences would impact on her in later professional life.

*'It was, as a baby, just being peed off with being poked so yeah it stems from there definitely. And actually if you want to relate that back that was one of the hardest points of the headship was the public face of it and actually*

*standing up in front of parents and doing the assemblies that I actually found hard and the personal judgements they were making against me but now, in probably quite a sadistic way, I enjoy that part of it. I have realised for me it is all about being prepared, being in control, being organised, don't ever put me on the spot, prepare me and I am fine.'*

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There was one other teacher in the family, an uncle who had been a deputy head teacher. Teaching may have represented an acceptable alternative to her family's more 'exciting' professions. Perhaps teaching and headship represented another kind of public performance.

### **Early Adolescence: A Changing Identity**

Her early negative experience of school did not appear to improve much with her transition to secondary school. However, later she found more positive experiences. At fourteen she is able to walk without callipers. Then another turning point: work experience in a primary school. She spoke movingly of this experience, when she was fifteen years old, where she found herself supporting children who were struggling to read, knowing and empathising from her own experience something of how they felt.

*'Well I wasn't very good, I was very late reading and spelling and things and it was actually the children who were struggling I just empathised completely with and I think that made me patient .... I think I just understood where they were coming from, in the struggling aspect of it.'*

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This experience appeared to be pivotal for her. It changed her perception of herself, and her perception of school. Here is the particular moment again recalled in more detail – note the linking with her experiences from early childhood, her relationships with parents and siblings, and her choice to pursue education. It is an extended extract but I think an important one.

*'Just working with a little girl, just working with her and it was just definitely eye contact and smiling and just that knowing 'I know where you have been' at 15 I knew how she was struggling and I knew what it was like and it was just a connection, you just knew. That made me realise that I suppose my sister had been extremely academic and my sister and brother had both been to boarding school which I couldn't go to because of my illness. So I suppose I had always lived in her shadow, she went to the really academic school down the road whereas I had always gone to convent schools and then to a nice little small independent school because I needed the social aspect of it rather than being pushed academically. Mum and dad obviously were concerned about my illness and not putting too much pressure on me but actually when we look back on this now my sister says she regrets tremendously going to the school she had gone to and she wishes to this day she had been to my school. She thinks she would have got so much more out of it, she is extremely successful. But I just think it was that time, it was definitely just connecting with that little girl, and we just sat at the back. She was doing a reading scheme which as I say she was struggling with and it was just like I know what you are going through, it is OK. I don't think I even said anything to her I don't think I knew about teaching reading but it was just more of a connection and it was just like there are other children out there like me and I am not the only one who struggles with reading and actually probably for a 15 year old that did me the world of good because it was actually around that time that, I am not saying I got better, but I attended school more, and I achieved 10 GCSE's and my A levels and whatever so. Maybe that made me realise, I don't know. I think I had always been with my best friend, and from the age of 13 she was told she was going to be a Doctor and another girl in*

*the class has been told she was going to be a Lawyer and my mum and dad said as long as you are happy you can go and do what you want. I don't think they probably even expected me to work to some extent so they would have always supported me I am sure. So I think if anything I would say they haven't pushed me enough and they have just never had any expectations, does that make sense. They have always just wanted me to be happy and I suppose deep down I would have liked a little bit of encouragement because I really had to do it myself but something did happen around 15 and yes I had been ill, that wasn't there but I think I did consciously decide to go to school even if I was not well.'*

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This experience was pivotal to her in her future choice of career, affording her a sense of identity and esteem away from, but essentially linked to, the 'not good enough' position she has identified with in her family and amongst her peers at school. It is the moment an alternative career choice and direction emerges, somewhere between the high aspirations of peers and the more limited expectations of her parents, whose career pathway she felt unable to follow;

*'But that was probably my only experience as a child. The only other experience I probably had was with my parent's profession which I was never going to follow into because I hadn't got a talent. I couldn't sing I wasn't a musician so I had to find something that I knew about if that makes sense. And again it comes down to that being in control, I probably wouldn't have gone out and sought a profession that I didn't know about because if I didn't know about it I couldn't be an expert in it.'*

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Suzanne received additional support from a tutor at this time, a woman who appeared to be a mentor and role model, a source of inspiration and a positive point for future identification,

*'When I just started my GCSE's I used to have extra tuition with one of my teachers and I used to go to her home and the house was an absolute tip but she had children everywhere and it was just a happy house and it sort of again made me feel comfortable there it was like being at home it was a happy lively house.'*

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Although she reported consistently in the interview that she had **not** been very academic she achieved 10 O levels and three 'A' levels upon leaving secondary school.

### **Transition to Adulthood:**

When leaving school she was told by careers advisors that people who did not get the 'grades' went into teaching, she takes this to mean her. She seems to accept this definition, it appears to fit with the image of herself and the image the school has of her.

Teaching was chosen because it was a profession that was known to her. She felt a degree of comfort because of this and the predictability it afforded her. Avoiding the 'risk' of more unknown fields of employment – it provided her with, something which appeared to be incredibly important to her - a degree of 'control'.

Suzanne had originally left school wanting to be a social worker. Possibly because of the life experience required to undertake social work training, she goes onto to study to be a primary school teacher at university (where she met her future husband). She enjoyed this as she describes here,

*'It was a feeling, I would say, it was more of a contented feeling being in the class room if that makes sense. It sounds weird what I am going to say but in a sense it was comfortable, it felt right, whereas I was actually quite nervous about going into to any other work environment but although I hadn't liked school myself, my early school probably because I struggled in many ways for missing a lot of it, actually going in and being in control because I soon learnt*



*that ok I had missed a lot of my education but to this day before I go and teach a subject I learn it the night before.'*

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The first school she decided to work at was in an area of high deprivation. In her own accounts she felt more like a social worker. Ultimately she disliked it here and moved on – perhaps this experience confirmed to her that social work was not what she really wanted. Perhaps it was too close to her early experiences.

The second school was also not an easy experience. She was emotionally bombarded it seemed by the head teacher who would call her, frequently crying down the phone. She described the experience of leadership here as '*emotional bullying*', it appeared difficult to maintain personal and professional boundaries. This would influence her later views about headship stating later in her narrative

*'A head teacher can never be friends with staff.'*

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### **Headship: In at the deep end. Enjoyment, ambition and stress.**

It was at this school, where after three years she had her first taste of headship, after the head teacher broke her arm.

*'So I was acting head. Only for a week while she was off but it really was sink or swim situation. It was I had just get on with it and I just found that I loved it, I was frustrated in that school because I couldn't change anything and I couldn't have a real impact but I actually realised, as up until that point I wasn't sure if I would like the sitting in an office and being away from the children because so many heads say 'oh they don't want to go out of the classroom because they don't want to lose the contact with the children' but instantly I saw you could have more of an impact with the children and*

*actually you could influence all the children's lives instead of just the 30 in your class.'*

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Later she moved to a smaller 'village school in special measures'. It was here that she was mentored by a male head teacher, who having just come into role himself, was set on school improvement and a quick turnaround before moving on. After he left she applied and was successful for the post of head teacher. She was thirty years of age. One year later her first and only child was born.

*'I always felt that family should come first but in that first year of headship, well not for the year for the first 6 months of headship, it's not the reality. Although I was the first to say about work/life balance I knew the answer, I knew what to say but it wasn't happening because I still thought I had got something to prove and I thought people had to be at work until 8 at night and to be honest I didn't just feel that, I had to, keep up with it!.'*

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There were significant descriptions of stress in her first year. Largely this appeared to be attributed to parents. A difficult incident with one parent culminated in what appeared to be a near emotional breakdown.

*'I hadn't slept for months I was just living off my nerves. Something stupid is that I started smoking, I hadn't smoked since a teenager, and I got to the point where I would get up in the morning and have a cigarette and go outside like my husband. I am anti smoking, I don't smoke so that was just weird. I would probably go home and have a bottle of wine every night, I don't drink during the week, and I'd have a bottle at weekends. So it was just little things I was doing to cope. I suppose I thought they were strategies to cope and they weren't at all it was just sort of.....(pause) ...and the final point was just before I went on the retreat I just literally went to the doctors*

*and broke down and she actually said to me is the only thing I can do, and I am going to do, this happened in the March, and she said I am going to sign you off until September. I said you can't do that I am back at work on Monday.'*

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She did not accept this directive from her Doctor but instead went to a retreat in Spain, which she found helpful in finding a perspective on what was happening.

There appeared to be a lack of support or trust in other head teachers. Although a mentor (another head teacher) was appointed to her in her first year of headship she recalls receiving only one phone call from him, summarising that he had his own school to manage and probably did not want to be a mentor anyway. She perceived this as a cynical attempt by the Local Authority to 'tick all the boxes' rather than any real attempt to support her.

### **Thematic Analysis**

Suzanne starts with a fragmented account of her experience of education. It is at this point she describes not wanting to be a teacher and instead wanting to be a social worker. This is reported alongside her not being very academic which is linked to her ill health and poor experience of primary school. Early in her narrative there is a key evaluation:

*'That people who did not get the grades expected went into teaching'*

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This is the recounted advice of her careers advisor. I think she recalls it here because it is so relevant to her choice of career and sense of self at this time. She then describes her first experience working in schools and of state schools,

*'I suppose for me, I hadn't realised up until that point about the state sector, so the first time I went into an inner city school nursery of the multi-cultural children and looked after children it was a complete shock but instantly I felt*

*at home there and I felt I could relate to these people and I felt comfortable in that environment so I knew I wanted to go on. I think if I had experienced going into a private sector school I don't think I would have liked that and I don't think I would have gone on this far.'*

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She identifies with children, who are different and disadvantaged, a shock because of her family experience but one she is strangely comfortable with. She seems more identified with these children than the children at private school. We can see why this is, given her biographical details but she does not make the connection here. These identifications do not appear to be fully conscious but she has an understanding that there was a benefit for her.

*'So going into education not only was helping the children but it has helped me as well.'*

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From here the narrative moves to her tutoring as a child. We later learn that her tutor provided a very different family and class experience which (predictably from her previous narrative) she also enjoys and feels at home with.

And then to her teaching career: in a thin narrative she describes her progression to headship. The one deviation is the brief description of emotional bullying she received at the hands of her second head teacher, and the lessons she learns from the experience.

She interrupts the flow of the narrative to say she had a baby - we later find out that she was told that she would never have a child - the relevance here appears to suggest that she is connecting it to an emerging theme of moving beyond expectations and the constraints of her disability. Her next statement is predictable - she makes an evaluation that she has always had to prove herself because of ill health.

*'I personally have felt from being very young I have had to prove a lot because of my illness and so whatever I have done in life I have had to, I am not saying*

*I have had to do the best, but I have had to just make sure I have done the best that I can achieve. So whatever I have done, especially with education it was something that I knew I was good at, in the sense of I was getting a response from parents, I was seeing children move on with their learning, children were happy.'*

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She then recounts that her Doctor advised that *'teaching was the worst possible profession'* for her and she connects this with her own fears and lack of certainty about her future health. These will become key themes in her narrative: survival, going beyond expectations, triumphing over adversity, and the need to keep proving herself. Underpinning all of these is her need for control (mentioned on six occasions) and her fear of future uncertainty.

There follows a report and more detailed narrative of being bullied by a parent as a head teacher which she takes personally. She recalls that there was no support and frequently she found herself waking up crying from her sleep. She reports going to the Doctor because of this (on her husband's advice) and then to a retreat in Spain. This again will be a recurring theme: stress linked to difficulties with parents. It will emerge three more times throughout her discourse and is always accompanied by accounts of stress and fears of breakdown.

Suzanne talks briefly about her family life before returning to her role as head teacher and the need to prove self – this time because of age – to other head teachers, whom she feels are patronising and competitive. She concludes from this that she cannot use them for support.

The next passage of narrative is largely about her difficulties in gaining respect: initially *'on the playground'*. Although this also seems to be linked with her difficulties in getting respect from peers (in the organizational playground perhaps) and then there is a reference to better pay in other professions where primary school head teachers are also not fully respected, not quite good enough. Suzanne appears to connect this with her own sense of not being good enough, returning here to the theme of **not** being very academic and she follows this with a very moving report - as a newly

qualified teacher – of crying at weekends because she cannot get her displays straight in her classroom. This theme continues with her struggles over adversity; pushing herself to learn, pushing herself to walk (she was told she would never walk without callipers), having children, and then close to the end of the first interview she finally speaks of being adopted:

*‘About being strong and overcoming things and if you want to take it, quite a therapeutic session this, (laughs) taking it even further back I am actually adopted. So again from day one I have been different and that has always made me, I don’t know, it has just made me the character I am and it affects everything I do. I don’t know why, I don’t know if you could say that by being adopted you have had, I have had a lot of therapy over this, but you know you could say if you feel you have been rejected or whatever then you are not going to be rejected later on in your life, you are going to prove that you can do things so I think some of it may come from that.’*

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She closes with speaking of the support she has from her husband and finally the prognosis that she may well be in a wheelchair by the time she is forty.

I was struck and shocked by these closing moments during the interview. Perhaps that is why she left it to the end. It explained much of what had gone before: the sense that she could never fit in, always felt judged, always had to prove herself and her ongoing and underlying fear of rejection. It also explained the dislocation that she felt with her adoptive parent’s profession and social class and her strong identifications with the disadvantaged and those who were different in some way – including Looked After Children.

## **Summary and discussion**

Suzanne’s was the longest of all interviews (over three and a half hours in total). I found it extraordinarily moving and emotionally draining. She appeared to gain much through speaking. I

was left with the strong sense that she had not had the outlet previously to explore or consider these matters or how it may impact on her or her work (although she did say she previously did have therapy for six weeks).

Professional support was an area that appeared to be largely absent for her, a deficiency which impacted on her both in role and outside of it. And yet it appeared that she would be unlikely to be able to ask for support. Her drive for self sufficiency and her lack of trust in, and sense of alienation from, her peers appeared to prevent this.

*'They proclaim when you go to courses that we should be sharing good practice and you should be sharing X,Y and Z but I know for a fact heads look at each other's OFSTED reports and are absolutely delighted when you don't do well. I have been on the other end of it when our school was failing and I knew neighbouring heads were saying the most awful things in church to members of the congregation about what an awful school it was, absolutely dire and I think Heads can be quite competitive and I think until they honestly break that down and stop being like that they will never move on.'*

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This lack of trust was paralleled with accounts of confiding in secretaries whom she did appear to trust or, in extremis, her Doctor. The loneliness she experienced in leadership appeared to be a result from her earlier lessons about not being able to have staff as friends and was compounded by the competition she witnessed amongst peers. It confirmed her belief that she had to 'stand' on her own two feet and not be reliant on others. A belief that clearly matched the attributes she required in this role.

*'I suppose bring it down to my illness, bring it down to the adoption whatever, I hadn't been in control of those things and I didn't like it. And therefore I felt I had to control and the biggest thing, I don't know if this is connected at all I*

*don't know where it has come from, but the biggest problem and the lesson that I am here on this earth to learn is patience.'*

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Her discourse demonstrated an overriding motivation for independence. This at times appeared to leave her isolated and stressed. There were numerous accounts of stress and exhaustion.

*'So I can work Monday to Friday and I sort of fight through it but then, this sounds ridiculous because it still happens now I literally go home, before I had my baby, and I would be in bed by 6 o'clock. Now I am in bed by 7.30 because I put my baby to bed at 7 read him the first story, then my husband takes over and I am usually asleep before my 3 year old. But I keep going during the week and I suppose I am quite scared that at some point I am not going to be able to control that and I will start sleeping, it will overcome things. I have forgotten what the question was (laughs).'*

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This in part appeared to be perceived as the necessary and required sacrifice of the role. I was struck that throughout her narrative she never appeared to blame anyone or question the work rate required of her.

*'Although I was the first to say about work/life balance I knew the answer, I knew what to say but it wasn't happening because I still thought I had got something to prove and I thought people had to be at work until 8 at night and to be honest I didn't just feel that, I had to, to keep up with it. There was so many jobs to do and the more I did the more there was to do and you are just never on top of it.'*

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There was no sense throughout the interview of self pity. Instead, what was articulated was a ferocious drive to succeed; expressed by her through the words – 'you are what you make yourself



to be!’ This self sufficiency appeared to come at a cost, for it highlighted a difficulty apparent in the interview of asking or getting support from others - unless in dire or desperate need – and also a continued need to prove herself, at great cost it seemed to her overall health.

*‘I don’t like relying on anybody else for anything, I always knew I wanted to go out and earn a living and support myself. A lot of my friends went off and their ambition in life was probably to marry somebody who would look after them or something stupid like that and I couldn’t think of anything worse, it is just not the sort of person I am. You come in to the world on your own and you go out of it on your own, you make the most of it don’t you?’*

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She appears to have selected a strategy, via education, of self sufficiency which avoided feelings of being out of control as well as the dependency on, and possible abandonment, by others.

Her discourse throughout was about resilience and succeeding over adversity and enormous hardship. It was as if she expected to struggle: she would continue to work when at times severely limited and in pain because of her disability.

She felt, as a head teacher, she was always being judged by people. During the interview, she made connection with her early experiences and recognised that this feeling of persecution had existed for her since a very young age – although it also appeared a piece of narrative highly relevant to the organization held in the mind and the feelings she currently experienced in role.

*‘I had a real problem with looking at people in the eyes as a three year old. It’s a family joke to this day that I used to have breakfast with cereal boxes in front of me and I remember doing it. I couldn’t stand people looking at me and I used to literally come down to breakfast, I am not a morning person anyway, foul mood, and at three I used to put these boxes of cereal around*

*me and everyone had to eat in silence because if anybody spoke to me I used to scream.'*

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I wondered if the therapy she had received had given her some insight into herself, which had been apparent throughout the interview.

Her early experiences would also explain her later difficulties with parents and parental figures (mainly woman) and possibly other authority figures but she does not perceive this connection. Positive support had come from her husband the positive organizational 'parenting' had come from a male head teacher – perhaps that is also why she could speak so candidly with me.

She seemed to largely accept the apparatus of inspection and regulation but was more affected by the judgments of children's parents and her professional peers. The strain of managing these relationships was worse than OFSTED. It was here that the incidence of stress was located. There were complaints about increasing workload, although she largely appeared to accept this expansion. The highly structured curriculum appeared to suit her needs for a predictable environment.

Suzanne's was a story of survival. Although she recognised the effects of her adoption there was a sense that she had 'good enough' parenting to sustain her throughout her difficulties. I was left feeling considerable admiration for her but also a high level of concern about her continued survival in role and the effects it may have, on her, and her young family.

## **Chapter 11**

**Participant F: Clive – Head Teacher (Joint Head ship) Male early thirties. Large City School.**

### **Biographical Data Chronology**

1974: Clive born.

1982: Younger brother born.

1985: Attends Scouts

1986: Age 12 becomes Sunday school teacher

1992: Attends teacher training college.

1996: 1<sup>st</sup> teaching job.

2<sup>nd</sup> school no date provided - first management experience

2007: 3<sup>rd</sup> School deputy head ship.

2007: Diagnosed with cancer.

2008: Joint headship.

## Biographical data chronology

Clive was in his early thirties when we met. I surmise he was by far the most active in pursuing teaching as a career and the most extreme in a business approach to school management, presenting himself almost as a business manager more than a head teacher.

### Early Childhood: Investment, expectations and performance.

The middle son of three boys, Clive came from a working class family in a small northern village. His family life appeared very settled and generations had worked and lived in the village. He would later speak of being the only one in his family to go to University, and indeed the only one who had left the town to work outside.

His grandparents were reported as having held domestic or gardening roles and his father had worked in a local factory. He reported that his father had left for work at 7am returning home at 6pm, spending the remaining time in his garden, which he told me his father lived for.

Clive had learnt to play music at a young age, encouraged by his mother, whose expectations appeared to be a strong influence on him.

*'My mum on the other hand, was not dominated by my dad but was aware of his kind of I suppose passiveness so she wanted opportunities for me so she would want me to play the piano and have singing lessons and play the church organ a whole range of things. I was in the scouts, went to youth clubs, very very active kind of childhood. She created opportunities for me to explore and develop through and the only thing that they only ever pushed me on was piano practice and the reason for that was because they were paying £3.50 per half hour per week and so that was seen as, you know, there is money being spent on you so there should be an outcome. And their expectations when people came round was that they would want me to play for the people.'*

Recounted childhood memories were of playing to grandparents, family and friends. He enjoyed the recognition that these performances had afforded him. His desire to be a teacher was crystallised at this early phase of his life and he went about this in a determined manner.

*‘Probably as young as 8 it was kind of always my dream, quite sad really, (laughs) but no, to be honest I geared most of my schooling, I geared it myself to kind of get to where I wanted to. I was always trying to work out what degree I would want to do and how I would get to that degree and what qualifications I would need and so I kind of geared that round the music. So all the way through my schooling I knew what I wanted to do which I think is quite unusual, not many people can say that from an early age. I have never had a break in my career, I have kind of gone right the way through.’*

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Teaching may have represented a clearly definable career pathway for his aspirations when few others presented themselves or when the other alternative was to follow family employment tradition. He clearly did not want to do this.

### **Adolescence: Leadership, structured activities, and moving beyond parental expectations.**

There had been a catalogue of ‘leadership’ roles as he was growing up; youth club leader, tuck shop supervisor and Sunday school teacher. All of them appeared to have been part of a fairly structured program of activities involving clubs or school.

There were no other members of the family employed in education; he was the only one of the family who had become a teacher. Of this his family would later be proud, but as he progressed through his adolescence his family were reluctant and his father was completely opposed to the idea, expecting him instead to follow his (and now his older brothers) career in the local factory.

*‘It wasn’t that my parents were pushy, they wanted the best and they provided opportunities but they were less than pushy when it came to my*

*career. To be honest by the time I got to 16 my dad had lined me up a job in a local factory and they were a working class family and he was, I think almost embarrassed that he had got his son a job. He did the same for my elder brother but he had got me this job and I refused to do it and I said "I am going to go and do A levels" and he stopped talking to me for ages because he was so annoyed, he could not understand why I would want to give up a job that was going to give me a good salary and would be constant. To kind of go on to train to be something that I don't think he ever thought would happen. He clearly never trusted my determination. But now obviously now it is the complete opposite and he loves the fact that I am the only one in the family who has left home.'*

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This appeared a key moment; he went against his father's advice and continued with his studies, his 'determination' propelling him towards teacher training a goal that, as we have seen, had driven him from early childhood.

There were few recounted memories of early life compared with other participants'. Indeed, the participant stated in relation to his past memories that unless something was useful to him it was discarded. Although in this extended account he recalls a moment in his adolescence;

*'So I think, I remember doing my GCSE's and when I was kind of building up to that I was in a house where we had a really lovely bungalow, there were only two bedrooms and my elder brother would have been 20 and I would have been 14 and my younger brother would have been 6, there was quite a gap. So my elder brother was playing loud music, going out with his friends, working in the local factory down the road, my younger brother was at the stage where he was just becoming independent and wanting to play lots, he wanted his brothers to go out and play football and I was in the situation*

*where I needed to work really hard to kind of you know, prepare for exams, all that kind of stuff and it was virtually impossible because with the two bedrooms, me being the middle child was kind of, I had my room, he had his room, the younger brother was in with one of us, generally me. And so it was just impossible to work and so in the end they decided instead of building an extension they would buy a very lavish, what I class as a summerhouse, it was like a chalet, because the garden is about an acre, it is enormous. So they bought this chalet which was heated and electric and it was put right next to the house and that became my room and I used to spend a lot of time up there just working really hard and I think getting that space for me was probably a bit of a turning point when my dad kind of thought well we have put all this money into this you had better use it and you had better work really hard, you better pass your exams and obviously I remember the moment of getting my exam results, going to pick up my GCSE's. No one came with me I just went down with my friends and they were all waiting at home and things like that. There were lots of proud moments when, like my piano results would come through and it would be sat there waiting and everyone would be waiting for me to open it and every time there was an achievement my dad was very quiet but clearly enormously proud about it. Whereas my mother would be quite vocal 'I knew you would do it bla bla bla' but my dad was always much quieter.'*

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Although there appeared to be little clear or stated motivation for wanting to be a teacher, this remembered extract indicates something of the commitment and sacrifices he and indeed his family made for his education, and the pressure this created for him to succeed. It also hints at a somewhat

structured, self sufficient, and isolated childhood; his other siblings being of significantly different ages to him, and his life from 14 onwards appearing to be focused largely, it seemed, on his studies.

**Early Adulthood: First teaching post, a shaky start, moments of vulnerability and learning for the future.**

Clive worked in three schools, each facing significant difficulties and challenges. He had chosen them on this basis and felt he had ‘expertise’ in ‘raising standards’. I felt this to be a slightly inflated claim given his rather limited experience compared with other participants’. He admired some of the head teachers he had worked with and these had appeared to provide role models for his later aspirations.

There was a moment of vulnerability in his first school where he recognised he was not performing well and then in the second school he was sick during an OFSTED inspection becoming concerned that he would be seen as ‘ofstedphobic’. He felt that this would blight his career, and indeed it did tarnish his image with the then head teacher.

*‘One of the things that was brilliant was that she very much bigged me up and you know, “you will be a great deputy etc etc” but then there was a turning point where it went disastrously wrong for me and. Um, well actually we were heading towards and OFSTED and the pressure that was put on the school was just ridiculously enormous and teachers were just absolutely caving under the pressure and I picked up one of these lovely viral infections, like what’s going round at the moment, and I had about a four week illness where it was very unfortunate. It started with this viral infection and then I had an allergic reaction to the penicillin they were giving me for the viral infection and it resulted in my face swelling up, that was the main effect. And so as a result I missed the OFSTED and there’s no problem with teachers missing an OFSTED apart from the personal stress that you cause yourself and every time there is*



*an OFSTED that takes place in a school there are people who aren't there. And because there is so much pressure piled on to an OFSTED it creates that sense of, I suppose dread. And so I missed the OFSTED and on my return which was probably about three weeks, no I was off for longer than a month, but anyway on my return I was kind of summoned to the office and her kind of line which does stick in my head because it wasn't that long ago "I have no issue with the fact that you have been off ill and that you have missed your OFSTED however the rest of the staff do and will probably not let you get over this". Well my attitude to that is that they can piss off, you know, I had put four years into the school at that point, I had been through one OFSTED with them already it wasn't like I was an OFSTED-phobe and I have done four OFSTED's now but from that point she had decided that I was out and that I was finished and she then just put this enormous pressure on me to go.'*

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He is now persecuted by the style of management he had admired. But remarkably, this head teacher would be a key role model for him in his later approach to headship. He identifies with it completely, possibly because it is perceived as being organizationally effective and valued. It also fits with a family model of hard work and repaying investment with results. He acknowledges later that he would draw upon this in his own approach to staff.

*'But it's amazing how managers in position have the ability to destroy, make or break, and I am very aware of that because I have done exactly her tactic to numerous members here when I first came.'*

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He had not wanted headship initially - because of the detraction from classroom teaching - but he was successful in gaining a deputy position and then in the same school took on a 'joint headship' which he shared with an older man. This offered him a balance of management and classroom

teaching which he told me he liked. Under their joint leadership the school had been recognised as very successful.

Clive was diagnosed with testicular cancer a few months after taking on this post. Although he was now clear he continued to have regular checkups.

## Thematic Analysis

This would be the shortest of all interviews - the first section would last only eight minutes. The whole interview would last just one hour.

Clive appears to struggle to start his narrative,

*‘Well, we may need to ask questions as we go along really, who knows? Um....’*

He then reports that he always wanted to be a teacher from a young age.

*‘Probably as young as 8 it was kind of always my dream, quite sad really,  
(laughs) but no, to be honest I geared most of my schooling, I geared it myself  
to kind of get to where I wanted to.’*

---

A report follows as he states that he never had a career break and worked all the way through. He explains that he never wanted to be a head teacher - but did want to be a deputy. This is followed by a global evaluation that the role of head teacher is now one of business manager. His narrative moves on to describing the positive aspects of the joint headship he now occupies, and how they have sought to make it work even though there were many sceptics. This thin narrative pattern is followed quickly with evaluations about education and learning and taking risks to move things on:

*‘If you are told you can’t do it then we generally find a way to do it, or if we  
can’t have something we will definitely find a way to get it. And that is pretty  
much my belief I think because in terms of head ship of a primary school it’s  
not just about providing a good education for the children I think it’s about  
being exciting and being a bit risky and sort of well if you want to change the*

*curriculum, if you want to move it on you have got to take chances otherwise it will never modernise and it will always kind of stick in the same kind of territories, that have been there for years and years because actually all that tends to happen with education is that it just keeps coming round and round and it is still based in the class room and children are still taught 100% of the time in an inside classroom space when in fact that's not really what learning is about in life.'*

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He continues by stating that a head teacher needs to be able to take risks and make those decisions, reflecting afterwards that he realized that he would be good at it, *'and that's when it* (his ambition to be a head teacher) *kicked in'*.

The closing section of his opening narrative is largely a series of comments about what he does not like about the role – which is mainly the administrative side of things which he dislikes but realises he has to do. It is followed (after a prompt from me) with a short reflection about how fragile the current position of the school actually is.

*'And I think for us we have kind of moved on a long way here, 4 or 5 years ago that would have been very much the case, the kids didn't perform very well, there was a lot of pressure on the school but you can easily see how that could revert, it could quite easily drop back. You only have to drop 10 or 15% off your standards and we would be back under the watchful eye of the Local Authority. But that can be quite a problem, I guess. (long pause). OK?'*

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This is where his opening narrative closes.

Overall the narrative structure across the whole interview is a curious mix of detailed statistical information - in relation to targets and budgets – and descriptions of a risk taking and challenging approach to schools management.

Throughout he appears to be very self-regarding. At times this comes across as omnipotent and controlling. The later, the need for control appeared a key theme. Stress was largely attributed to not being in control of situations: related to himself personally with a diagnosis of cancer and, professionally having to negotiate with the Local Authority - *'The main stress is the fact that it is run by the Local Authority'* - other agencies, and parents.

## **Discussion**

This was the shortest of all interviews and was largely made up of reports rather than detailed narrative. Even when prompted, his answers were brief, frequently statistical, sometimes contradictory and almost always to the point. This appeared to indicate something of the single mindedness and drive from young childhood which appeared to have excluded other options or alternatives. The desire to be a teacher had, it appeared, completely shaped the choices of his childhood and early adult life.

This appeared to indicate a drive for leadership and more explicitly, for control. Underneath this was what appeared a ruthless single minded determination which had greatly supported him in his achievements, but at some cost it seemed, for it gave him a considerably hard edge, and had done from a young age.

There were echoes in his brief childhood descriptions of his later style of management. Tight systems of order within the school appeared to leave very little to chance; all books across the school were colour coded, and even the bins in the school needed to be exactly where it was agreed they should be.

He saw the role of head teacher as a 'business manager.' And his discourse at times reflected this approach:

*'The only thing that is consistent in school, it's not the teachers, it's not the pupils, it's the systems that you put in place and those systems have to run from nursery to year six otherwise you have no direct comparisons and you can't then implement them successfully. And that's an example of the books, I went back and said this is not right and they were kind of "well you know we don't think this particularly works", and I said, "well that's not the point". "Whether you think it works or not is irrelevant". You know, that comes out at the right level at the right discussion and then the decision is taken across the board you don't just go "it doesn't work, I don't like it, let's change it."*

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However, paradoxically, it was the bureaucratic components, which he felt were part and parcel of the relationship with the Local Authority, which appeared to cause him stress. There was no regret or sense of loss for a more supportive relationship. To the contrary, he wanted them to leave him alone so he could manage unencumbered by 'red tape' which he felt provided him with little added value.

Generally he appeared uninterested in working with parents '*I have always never really been interested in the parent side of things*' and found this, in the community he now worked in, a frustrating and unproductive activity. He appeared to articulate a wider belief in the primacy of the school in producing good future prospects and outcomes when parenting could not be guaranteed or relied upon to support these aims.

Perhaps this was a translation of some of his own earlier experiences, namely the recounted passivity of his own parents in his education. But it also highlights one of the complexities of the role; relationships with parents. This participant had adopted one of the more extreme stances in relation to this, I suspect, leaving the other head teacher to manage these relationships.

This joint consensual approach to headship appeared to work for them, allowing both to utilize their own and each other's strengths.

*'That's pretty much the situation I have got here that you know, XXX's strengths were most definitely management in terms of people, personnel, budgets, the building etc and my strengths were definitely to do with school improvement, pupil achievement, assessment, target setting etc etc.'*

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One can see this situation having developed as an effective adaptation to the changing role of head teacher in the changing framework of schools and education. The tasks were essentially divided, Clive holding the aspects of business management, and the other head teacher a more paternalistic model of people management (the more traditional component of the head teacher's role).

Clive did not appear to question the current systems of schools management against a broader or wider political framework. There were no historical comparisons going back to previous educational regimes. All his professional experience had been after the Reform Act (1988). While we can read this as a story about a personal style of leadership, it can be seen as representative of something wider. Clive was a product of the educational philosophies post the Reform Act when his training and professional development was just starting. Therefore his style of leadership can be seen as being heavily influenced by the organizational milieu he had spent his professional life within.

Clive wanted greater professional autonomy to do the things he felt was needed at a local level although he provided significant evidence that he was just getting on and doing these anyway. There was something very liberating and slightly adolescent about the way he appeared to describe this position.

*'I said well that's just ridiculous, you know, I want some chickens and they said you can't have chickens it just totally out of the question, impossible. So I just went and got a hen house and got a pen and bought some chickens and put them in the school and said I've got them. And it just kind of all went quiet and then I got health and safety letters through the post saying you need to carry out a risk assessment. I was like for god's sake, you know, we*

*take the children to the farm every year, they spend a week working with milking cows, pigs, chickens, whatever, why can't I have chickens at school. No one could actually answer it, so I just filled in a health and safety form, sent it back and never heard a word but, you know that's an example, where people are telling me I can't have it.'*

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There was a level of risk taking and with it substantial creativity. He had made significant changes within the school and completely reorganized some aspects of the structure, i.e. when he first took up headship he deleted a school care taker post and then negotiated a good price with a private contractor as an when he needed a service. He detested bureaucracy (for himself) and found his own ways of doing things when he was frustrated,

*'They told me I can't have a wood floor in the school because it is going to be too noisy and acoustics and this-that-and-the-other so I just put one down anyway. There's a big summer house in the garden where it was something I saw and it cost £10,000 and I thought it's just totally impossible, can't afford something so luxurious. So when my assistant head resigned in the summer I kind of looked at the salary and I thought well if I don't have her for a term I am going to save £15,000. If I don't have her for two terms I am going to save £30,000. I looked at what she did and I thought well I'll put a class teacher in for £24,000 and I will save the rest of the money and I went to Chelsea Flower Show, bought it on my credit card, gave it to the bursar and went 'I have bought this' and she just looked at me and said where's that going to come from. I said "xxxxx's salary for a term". That was it, sorted.'*

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His approach overall had appeared to be successful. There had been outside (and international) interest in his methods and the systems that he operated within the school. There was a paradox:

his own anti bureaucratic and somewhat cavalier style of management in response to external demands was completely at odds with his style of management within the school which was controlling, ultra bureaucratic and systems led. It seemed from his description, that he liked having control over the school but he did not like the wider system having control over him.

I was struck throughout the narrative by a lack of emotional engagement both with myself and within the description of relationships with staff, children and their parents. He did, however, appear passionate about his work - the running of an efficient school to get the best value for children.

*‘One of the things I have been able to do here is kind of keep shouting and keep making myself known so people actually know that if you are working with me I am not a pushover and by not being a pushover you are getting a better deal for the children.’*

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There was no sense of a paternalistic caring for staff. While driven to get the best out of people, he acknowledged they would have difficulties which would at times necessitate *‘bigging them up’* as well as at other times *‘rigorously managing them’*. He expected to see teachers moving on after four years and did not want people to get too comfortable; there was a sense that he felt this bred complacency. Overall, his emphasis was on effective systems, not consistent teaching staff.

*‘I will say to them you come for an interview here we expect you to be here at 7.30 in the morning, we expect you to leave no earlier than 5 – 5.30 it is a ridiculous working day, we know that it’s gruelling, you are expected to work extra-ordinarily hard and this is what we expect you to teach, and they can decide. I don’t expect the teachers to stay here forever, it’s an inner city school, there is a high burnout/turnover but unfortunately I can’t get rid of them at the moment, they won’t go which is quite nice but unfortunately*



*there is going to have to be some sort of moving, you know, there has got to be some moves this year because we are getting too stagnant so it will either be a move to another school or there will be a change in people's positions and responsibilities. I have got younger staff in the school who need developing and I haven't got the space to develop them.'*

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He appeared business minded, self sufficient, entrepreneurial, a risk taker who had been successful in turning the school round along with the other head teacher. It appeared to be an effective partnership which delivered results and also – more surprisingly to me - retained staff. However he also acknowledged how precarious 'success' was,

*'The thing is that the whole school is quite rightly judged on the output and you know our standards are doing really well at the moment but if they were to drop next year we would suddenly be back in the spotlight and all pressure would be there again and so I think the difficulty is you have to apply the pressure without pressure because you can't operate a school where you are constantly just on everyone's case to make sure that the children have churned out the right level because you do have kind of slack periods and you do have kind of years that aren't as strong as other year groups. You do have teachers that go through personal crisis and things that knock everyone off course and the reality is that you have one teacher who is responsible for 30 children and if that teacher is not on the ball the year doesn't do very well, you can't get that back, it has gone.'*

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Clive gave no account of his personal life. In this sense he remained a stranger to me. And yet, although there was little meandering from the question, the moments of deviation somehow conveyed a powerful sense of him; his diagnosis with cancer soon after taking on headship, and a

not remembered and second hand school memory, and a trip to Hadrian's Wall which I will return to in later chapters.

He struck me as direct, impatient and intense. He was impressive in his focus and drive, but he struck me at times like an automaton. There was little warmth throughout the interview, where the underlying passion was focused on the systems of education he had put in place in the school and the successful outcomes he felt this had secured. It felt a modern example of one type and model of schools leadership.

Afterwards on the walk to the train station I found myself admiring him but at the same time struggling to know or like him. Much later, rather interestingly - but uncomfortably - I would consider him to be the participant I could most identify with. Perhaps this was because of his gender and background but I also suspect it had to do with his struggle, focus and his determination to move beyond the limited expectations of family and social class. This ultimately was a story of upward social and class mobility. Education had been the vehicle.

## Chapter 12

### Why choose to be a teacher and head teacher?

In what ways can we understand how individuals choose their careers? This chapter focuses on the patterns and pathways that participants took into education and to headship, it will consider the psycho social factors which influenced participants' in their choice of profession and role, and essentially, how they have made sense of it looking back from their current perspectives.

This study vividly demonstrated the significance of early experiences in choice of profession and the formation of underlying drives and experiences that had propelled many into leadership roles.

To orientate ourselves, this chapter will provide insight into some of the research questions set out below:

- How have head teachers negotiated the tension between their role and their experience of society?
- What are the kinds of psycho social patterns which help us to understand how personal and professional biographies converge in leadership roles?
- Why did participants become teachers and head teachers?
- What kind of profession is teaching and what 'kinds' of people does it attract and has this been affected by changes in education?
- Did participants' feel sufficiently esteemed and authorised to do the job and where does this come from?
- What led to the career choice of teaching?

This chapter will consider the interviews collectively and will seek to shed light on the personal and professional trajectories which led participants' to choose teaching and headship as a career. From the understandings developed in this chapter, I will later consider how these primary motivations were influential in later professional identify and the negotiation of stresses and pressures within their changing work environment.

When placed alongside other chapters, this chapter provides insight into **why** participants selected their respective career pathways and **how** these pathways appeared to influence them as they took up the role initially of teacher and then later as head teacher.

I am not trying to distil social fact or theoretical data, but instead will try and establish some of the factors which appeared to have influence on career choice, the threads and strands of experience, as it were, which brought them to Headship.

I will then consider in which ways these narratives may in some way be typical or suggestive of certain ‘types’ of professional pathways as we move from considering the individual accounts of previous chapters to considering their collective relevance.

### **Early Life Experiences**

All participants have, in response to the initial question, returned to the world of childhood. This appeared to be relevant in their later choice of profession and choice to work with children. Early life experiences were shown to be significant in personality development, leadership style and stress management.

What appeared throughout interviews was the tendency of participants to draw from their own particular histories as a way of making sense of their choice of career (or the careers they did not choose) and aspects of the work that they found hard or challenging or indeed enjoyed. Some consciously identified aspects of their own childhood with examples of their work with children.

*‘Just working with a little girl, just working with her and it was just definitely eye contact and smiling and just that knowing ‘I know where you have been.’*

**Participant E.**

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This would appear to suggest that, when faced with the task of work, these fundamental and developmental aspects of personality are not far from consciousness or awareness; professional capacities therefore may well be linked to early childhood experience. Some appeared surprised at

the associations they had made during the interview process, which would suggest that these thoughts are not always conscious or fully understood in relation to work role.

*'So there you go, yes I had forgotten about all of that (laughs) about singing in my pram and stuff.'* Participant C.

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Some recounted what appeared to be unhappy childhoods with memories of adoption, hospitalization and neglect. These difficult early beginnings did appear to represent some motivation to work later, as an adult, in the world of childhood. For some, this had also been the chronological and environmental site of earlier trauma and difficulty.

### **Reparation as motivation.**

Career choice represented a need to come to terms with earlier unresolved issues, which created both strengths and vulnerabilities within the individual. This furnished some participants with a high level of patience, resilience, and understanding to undertake work with young children. It also appeared to render them potentially more vulnerable to stress arising from the work, in what at times appeared to amount to a professional Achilles heel – a subject I will come back to in the later chapter on stress.

The sensitivities garnered from their own experience, would make for a dedicated and effective teacher with the desire and emotional capacity to tune into primary school age children. But it also highlighted possible blind spots, models in the mind of participants' which appeared to have powerful influence on later professional idioms.

*'It's quite interesting talking about it because when you do talk about it you begin to think yourself about how all the bits fit together. And there is no doubt in my mind that some of my early life experiences have influenced my beliefs and approaches.'* Participant C.

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Many of the accounts demonstrated the constant negotiation, which is required of adults who work with children, between their own childhood experiences and the environments in which they have chosen to work in. Two participants (C, E) in particular appeared to be working with children of similar age to themselves when they were experiencing difficulties in their own childhoods.

These difficult early beginnings generated in some a fundamental drive to support children, who became on some levels, identified with, and representative of, certain aspects of self. This suggests that there is a significant emotional benefit associated with the task, an attempt to 'make good' the participants' own experience which had become, largely unconsciously identified in children. Therefore, teaching or helping others may bring some relief from one's own experience.

*'And I suppose it addressed my needs. I may be of the need to want to fix things for children and I hadn't thought of that before, until now when we started talking (laughs) but perhaps it is something that I need for myself because I do thoroughly enjoy what I do. I can't imagine doing anything else.'*

**Participant E.**

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Melanie Klein (1946) identified the anger, hatred and destructiveness behind the innocence of childhood and the associated guilt. We are, according to Klein, what our beginnings are – the earliest templates of experience far outreach childhood and follow us throughout our adult and professional lives. There is much in these narratives that would support these ideas. Teaching children may represent something of a reparative act for the individuals concerned. By returning to the environmental and life-stage sites of earlier difficulty, there is perhaps an attempt, through supporting children, to repair aspects of self that have been felt to be both damaging and damaged. This was one type of motivation. The participants that were primarily motivated in this way were subjectively close to children in their discourses and seemed to have a deep understanding and close identification with those who were struggling. They valued the transformational nature of education in an emotional and psychological sense. For some these motivations found fertile ground in the

expanding parameters of the role of teacher and head teacher which has been a feature of schools in the last decade.

This link with childhood may be true of other professions but maybe significantly pertinent to those professions, including teaching, where by the nature of the work there is a choice to specifically to work with children.

### **Failure at School and teaching as a Semi Profession**

The not quite good enough roles some had occupied within their family (where other siblings were seen as being brighter or more successful) or within their academic work (where other students were seen as being more gifted) were informative of where they would place themselves in the market for work.

*'I haven't got a talent, I can't sing, I can't play an instrument I am not that good with languages I suppose so I had to find a different way of succeeding.'*

**Participant E.**

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Teaching was selected on the basis that it was within the middle range. Early psycho social templates fostered a continued identification with the position of not being good enough which, when translated into the choice of occupation, meant that teaching, already identified as not being 'top flight' allowed earlier models and ideas about self in relation to others to be maintained.

Despite being impressive individuals and professionals, many harboured underlying doubts about their abilities. Perceived 'failure' or difficulties at school was a recurring theme that ran across many interviews (A, C, D, and E) generating a sense in the individual of not quite being good enough. The perceived 'fit' between perception of self and perception of profession was motivation to work in Education.

*'She (my sister) can speak five foreign languages, fluently, she is really intelligent and I was the one who just became a teacher.'* Participant E.

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The sense of failure, even if it appeared that individuals had done rather well, seems to dominate or provide a back drop to many narratives. For participants' 'failure' could be not doing well on the 11+ exam, or not getting into Oxford. This sense of early difficulty pushed some to greater exertion. Education appeared to be the main pathway for these efforts. But even with this additional vigour teaching was still identified, perceived, and selected on the basis of it being perceived as a 'second string' profession; where apparently more successful peers moved on to be solicitors, barristers and doctors, or on to making 'lots of money in the City.' This is a key point. The opinion of self participants had developed was manifest in their identification and choice of career.

*'I knew early on that students that did not get the top marks went into teaching.'* Participant A.

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Few chose teaching outright; it was certainly not described by many as being clearly targeted or a clearly sought professional trajectory – more of a ricochet. Not then a first choice profession. For most, it was felt to be more accessible in relation to age and qualification than, for example social work, psychotherapy, and other helping professions, (where considerable 'life experience' is frequently required before admission on a course). So, structural blocks on route blunted the early ambitions of some and left them casting around for alternatives. In these circumstances teaching represented an easily identifiable, compatible, (and in some cases perhaps 'lazy') alternative to target their energies. Views about the status of teaching as a profession were reinforced by the wider system, in the advice given by teachers, careers advisors and lecturers.

This was one position, one type; others were certainly more ambitious. They choose teaching because of the second rung perception. However, because they are approaching from a different social position they perceived this choice as a 'step up' the occupational or social ladder. The not quite good enough aspect is relevant but related to social class rather than any personal sense of failure. In fact, the reverse was apparent.



There is a wider dynamic at play: teaching as a profession and education as a system represents the frontiers of the class system, an occupational and structural gateway between social classes for families and children with aspirations. A point I shall return to in more detail later.

### **The influence of Family**

Parental professional status, values and expectations appeared to be a significant factor in future choice of career. I was able to discern three positions in response to these formative influences; those that closely identified and followed parental occupations, those that avoided or dis-identifies with parental expectations; and, finally, those who find a midway position or a compromise formation where the parental occupation is not followed but the underlying value base of parents is continued through career choice. I will explore these positions and other factors within this section.

### **A Source of Positive Confirmation in the family.**

Doing well at school resulted in positive feedback and considerable praise for some throughout early childhood.

*‘But I think children, myself included, were rewarded for being able to read a page from their reading book to their aunt who came to visit, it was very much show them how well you can read. There was lots of confidence building, lots of pride when you came home and said oh I’ve got a speaking part in the concert – you got huge amounts of praise for that. You always felt that you had done well, whatever it was you had done well and it was the whole family that were involved with that.’ Participant B.*

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This kind of recollection was not unusual; there were some strikingly similar accounts from a number of participants’. Doing well and success at school resulted in recognition and reward from the wider family. There were indications from many participants’ of considerable benefit to their confidence and self esteem arising through performance in education.

Doing 'badly' or 'failing exams' on the other hand, had – not surprisingly - the reverse effect, for one, Peter. The 'failure' of his 11 + exam was perceived by his family as catastrophic.

We are able to discern from this that primary school education was remembered by some as a site of self esteem and recognition which held capital within family and community belief systems. Prestige, it seemed, was won or lost on the basis of 'performance' at school even at a young age.

### **The Influence of Parents**

All participants' spoke about their parents. Of these, two had both parents who were teachers (participants A and C); two more (participants B and D) had parents who were involved in the 'helping professions' in some way. All spoke of someone within the close family network who had either been a teacher, a head teacher or worked in a similar status helping profession – with the exception of participant F.

For some, teaching and education was a fundamental part of the world in which they grew up, although this was not always positive as participant C recounts;

*'I mean I used to get a bit fed up with it I suppose, (laughs) I would have quite liked to have been talking about something else but I think my parents were fairly single minded about wanting to do well in their work.'* Participant C.

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The single mindedness perhaps would later extend to their children and their children's choice of career. It was easy to see why in these circumstances that teaching would be an easy pathway to follow. It was a professional area that would be known and provided an easy continuation of parental occupations, family values and associated expectations, avoiding more uncertain and hitherto untested careers, discourses and value systems.

*'My dad's brother was a teacher and went on to be a head teacher and inspector.'* Participant B.

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For those whose parents were not teachers, early identifications with the values of parents would also play a part; parental values, occupations or beliefs frequently appeared as motivation for role. The choice of teaching for some appeared to be an attempt, consciously or unconsciously, to follow and stay close to the professional status and values of their parents. Early identifications with parents, while appearing as motivation for role, were paralleled with a need to separate from them. This provides insight into the tensions involved in career choice and its role in the process of individuation, as parental embargoes are navigated at the point of transition between childhood and adulthood. Teaching represented a continuation for some, a rejection of parental models and a new pathway for others, and for some a balance somewhere in-between.

Career choice maybe one vehicle in the process of identity formation where identification with and separation from parental identities are prominent markers in claiming one's own future identity. Career selection is one of the bridges from adolescence to adulthood and, for some, this appeared to play a key part in that developmental process.

A public service ideal embedded within family tradition could find expression in a different but connected way through the avenue of education.

*'Both my parents worked in social work as well, mum particularly in fostering and adoption and my Dad more with adolescents so there was always lots of emphasis on that really, it was my upbringing. So there was the social minded side of the world, surrounded by lots of social workers and teachers and stuff while I was growing up I suppose. So definitely core motivation about people and doing something positive and doing something, I don't want to sound trite, but to make a difference and all of that.'* Participant D.

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In this instant, the choice of education allows the participant to stay close but also to achieve a degree of separation from their parents; a midway point between outright adoption and outright

rejection of the parental model and values which continues to incorporate a social commitment to children.

The influence of parents was sometimes described in more overt terms, with recollections of advice at the point of career selection.

*'And I was really wanting to go to music college and I just remember my father saying you know "if that's what you want to do that's fine, but you need to think about what your prospects might be, you know, it's really competitive and so on and so forth and although you might not find teaching attractive particularly, it's very good. There are lots of good things about it and other people are out of work and are made redundant and don't have a pension, all those things are there in teaching".'* Participant C.

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This participant, Peter, chooses to follow both his parents and, at 16, decides to become a teacher. He had wanted to follow engineering or music as a career. His father's advice at this stage was a pivotal moment in changing his future professional trajectory.

This appeared to be a form of sublimation (Stapley, 2006), an unconscious defence where aspects of self which are felt not to be acceptable are redirected in ways that are acceptable to others. This can have positive affect providing conflict resolution and benefits for the individual and society. Stapley (2006) suggests that in studying the lives of many great people sublimation can be evidenced as having positive effects on their careers. However, this study highlights that vulnerabilities can also be produced by the child's repression of future desires; Bollas (1989) suggests this is akin to the repression of painful memories, which he equates to a particular kind of loss – the loss of future self. The advice given by this participant's father demonstrates the perception of the profession in the 1960s: a safe (but dull) alternative to his more exciting option of music. It turns out to be neither safe nor dull. The other participant whose parents had both been teachers was given a different response to her career plan.

*'I decided I wanted to be a teacher and I think my dad thought I was mad. I don't think he actually said you are mad he probably said 'oh what are you bloody letting yourself in for!'* Participant A.

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This account of her parent's response in the 1980s shows the changing perception of the profession from those who occupy posts within it. Interestingly, she perseveres despite this reaction which demonstrates how powerful early identifications with parents can be in future motivations to work.

Clive, participant F, in response to explicit parental advice does something altogether different. He avoids following his parents careers. He rejects his father's advice and offer of work in the local factory and instead continues with his own early aspirations to be a teacher. In the longer term, he appears to be in a better position because of this decision than Peter, who is left wondering after his retirement for ill health, whether he was in the right job – it was a choice he did not appear to make for himself.

Others appeared not to be unduly influenced by their parents through any direct advice given or recounted. This lack of interference overall seemed to be a good thing.

### **Education and social mobility**

Not all recounted difficulties in childhood. Those that did not describe their childhood in this way appeared to focus on the potential advantages of a career in education. Education was perceived as a means of escape from social class or limited opportunity a way of improving self and ones lot. Generally, by birth, more working class than other participants this group had early on sought to do well at school as a means of creating other opportunities.

These participants (B, F), both from small village communities, appeared to have used education as an escape from either social disadvantage or limited local or community prospects. Clive's (Participant F) wish to be a teacher not only represents a professional desire but also a wish for upward mobility. The second case, a woman (Participant B), has rather limited role models in the small mining village she grows up in. Teaching provided an easily identifiable career option: some of

her friends at school follow the same path and also move to other parts of the country following qualification.

As teachers (and as head teachers) both had chosen to work in deprived schools and, not unsurprisingly, viewed education as a vehicle for social mobility, a means by which children could move out of their current circumstances - however disadvantaged they maybe.

*‘Again everything revolved around education, very much. I suppose, not as a way out, but to have opportunities, I think that was the big thing to have a different life.’ Participant B.*

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This may represent a different ‘type’, those motivated by social mobility both for self and others. This was echoed in the recollections of (participant C and D’s) grandparents who were determined their children (the participant’s parents) would gain a good education to support social mobility. Education was the key.

*‘My mother had grown up in a working class family in Lancashire, her mother and father had both been mill workers in the cotton industry and her mother, my grandmother, had been determined that my mother would do well at school and my mother got a scholarship to go to the local grammar school and then a scholarship to go to university otherwise she would never have got there and there was this very strong work ethic. Strong Baptist upbringing, my mother was brought up involved in the Baptist church and I think all of that was that you can succeed in life if you work hard enough and if I wasn’t succeeding it was because I wasn’t working hard enough, or not concentrating on the right things.’ Participant C.*

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This extract powerfully depicts intergenerational pressure on children to do well at school. It also demonstrates that teaching was a career choice which matched family idioms. It was used by some

participants as a vehicle for their political, social or religious beliefs, frequently appearing to stem from their family belief system.

Teaching, therefore, becomes an extension of beliefs and value systems held within family and provides a motivation in three respects: firstly, it has capital within the ideological frame of the family culture; secondly, it becomes a means of realizing, connecting and living out some of these ideals; and, thirdly, it is a method of imparting some of these values to children. This kind of cultural transmission is suggestive of the underlying task of schools.

The discourse of many participants suggests something of what schools may represent to children their families, the community and society: a passport to later life chances and success, an escape from social and economic disadvantage or limited life chances. Generally, participants were from middle class family backgrounds. Teaching as a profession would fit into this social class bracket. The profession holds a central place on the threshold of class structure, between the middle and working classes, and as such, it is an obvious route for social and class progression.

Although aspirations were not always supported by family members, there was evidence that somewhere within the family system (be that parent or grandparent) there was some driving or supporting influence to 'do better' or 'do well'. Class teachers or tutors were also recalled as a source of support in some narratives and appeared to have been very significant in providing an early point of identification for future aspirations. For working class children, teachers and teaching appeared to provide an easily identifiable route for social class progression, which, linking to the point above, was a professional choice that allowed a separation from parents and social class while also facilitating closeness and connection. Experiences of early deprivation and hardship followed by a successful career were frequently paralleled by a choice to work in or return to areas of high deprivation.

This may be representative of the place of education in the community. Education is the major allocator of where you will be in society. People do not have equal life chances and education is potentially an area which can mitigate early social disadvantage. This was certainly recognized by

some and formed the genesis to work as at teacher and head teacher, often with disadvantaged children.

This type of head teacher appeared to have benefited tremendously from their own experience in school and had become identified with the potential for social mobility and increased life chances offered to children. This was a key source of motivation and professional esteem, and supported a model of internal authority which was felt to be justified because it was in line with their own value base and the perceived value base of the organization.

### **The Avoidance of Risk**

Some participants' recounted the 'obvious' occupational route of proceeding from school, to college, and back to school again, as if this had been a way of avoiding more challenging occupational choices outside of the educational environment.

*'And I was thinking very narrowly then because I don't think I knew about the big wide world and I thought I don't want to do medicine I know that, and I wouldn't have a hope in hell of getting into a course anyway, and I think probably I thought what courses can you do a degree and get work from? You can do medicine, you can do law, you can do teaching and I think that was as far as I thought. And I knew I wouldn't get on to law, I didn't know enough about them; I suppose everyone knows about teaching because they have all been to school.'* Participant A.

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For these participants, education and teaching appeared less risky and was a route that delayed the process of growing up by putting off decisions about other less known, more uncertain, professional pathways.

*'It was a feeling, I would say, it was more of a contented feeling being in the class room if that makes sense. It sounds weird what I am going to say but in*



*a sense it was comfortable, it felt right, whereas I was actually quite nervous about going into to any other work environment.’ Participant E.*

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Here, in this example, familiarity is sought, even when the school environment has provided hitherto uncomfortable and unpleasant experiences. The overwhelming factor is the need to choose something that is known and predictable, which links with a need for control, frequently expressed in interview.

Childhood fears, about growing up, maybe played out in the selection of work role. If we liken this situation to the process of weaning in early infancy, we can see that there is never a point of separation from the organization, which potentially leaves head teachers who share this trajectory organizationally more immature than managers in other sectors. Linking back to Harold Bridger’s (1976) concept of platforms of experience in relation to future resilience to stress, we can see that it may be problematic and a potential disadvantage – but one that is encouraged institutionally.

Once in teacher training, only one participant looks at other employment alternatives (because of her partners work), and she decides that she has no transferable skills even for secretarial work and returns to teaching. Overall, this is a somewhat surprising position: in an age where a life time career is anachronistic in the wider occupational culture, we find among head teachers the reverse, rather cloistered position.

This situation both personal and organizational is suggestive of a ‘closed system’ (Roberts, 1994, Lewin, 1947). Where, instead of the inputs and outputs, and the cross boundary transitions of the ‘open system’ schools in these narratives have generally a restricted relationship with the wider system - as do most of the participants. The result of this is the maintenance of professional immaturity of members and the potential subversion of the primary task of the organization – which can all too easily shift to meet the internal needs of its members, while avoiding the frightening world outside of school.

## The Changing Nature of Work

*'And I think he said well you know, look at my career and what I have done and you know it's been all right, you know this is a good thing to do, So I think in the end that was that, it wasn't a difficult conversation or anything he was just saying think about what you are going to do and he persuaded me I think.'* Participant C.

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This is the recollection of Peter, of his father's advice, given at the point of choosing his future career. I wonder whether there is difference in how profession is seen in contemporary society in relation to identity and how it was seen forty or fifty years ago. Our professions have become far more indicative of who we are - not just what we do. When our oldest and longest serving participant was selecting his career on the basis of his father's rather pragmatic advice, there felt to me a rather qualitative difference in the gravity of the decision. Perhaps it was an easier decision to accept and make on this basis. This seems to be reflective of a wider process of individualization which was apparent across the interviews. Newer appointments were not looking to work in the same school for life – the contrary in fact – but there was a stronger sense that they identified with the role and were generally making a more explicit and calculated choice in choosing to be a teacher than older participants. The meaning they brought to and took from the role at the point of choosing appeared to be very different and was perceived as having greater implications. I think these changing societal perceptions of work and the nature of work and the pressure they exert on individual choice are an important consideration.

## Onwards and Upwards to Headship

### Motivation for Headship

*'I think that now, reflecting back on my life I don't think there was a moment where I thought I am going to be successful, it was just that if I was in a*

*situation where you know there was a job coming up and I applied for it, I really wanted to apply and big time wanted to get it.’ Participant C.*

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Headship offered an avenue within teaching which nevertheless provided a credibility and social status equivalent to that of other professionals. In this sense, headship compensated some for the choice of profession allowing them to gain status even though they perceived themselves in a lower division in the occupational league table.

*‘It’s just my profession isn’t as exciting as other people’s in my family. So I have always had to do well, does that make sense?’ Participant E.*

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Headship was sought not because of the ‘pull’ of ambition or aspiration but, for some, as a flight from the failure of early experience. This had seen many participants’ catapulted up the schools hierarchy from a young age. This ‘Success’, defended and insulated some from earlier vulnerabilities and the associated feelings of shame and humiliation. Shame was a powerful motivator. The need to keep proving self was, and I do not feel this can be underestimated, profoundly linked to frequently unconscious experience, which continually drove them onwards.

*‘But I had that real “I have got to succeed” and I particularly had that when I started working, wanting to be successful. And I think that stems from my early life where the fact that I hadn’t, that I had failed something, (my 11 plus exam) was a big issue for my parents and therefore a big issue for me.’*  
Participant C.

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This kind of motivation appeared to amplify the primary motivation for role. This primary motivation remained intact but became extended to the whole school. Wanting to have a ‘scale of impact’ over and above the classroom was a key element in explaining why some chose to progress

into the role of head teacher. These factors may represent some aspects of the underlying psychological contract for leadership.

*'I wasn't sure if I would like the sitting in an office and being away from the children because so many heads say "oh they don't want to go out of the classroom because they don't want to lose the contact with the children", but instantly I saw you could have more of an impact with the children and actually you could influence all the children's lives instead of just the 30 in your class.'* Participant E.

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It seemed that in accounts of leadership aspirations and practice, internal experience and motivation became amplified, and one of these amplifying factors was frequently the emotional force and prominence of earlier experience – negative and positive - and the associated defences.

Early blows could have a powerful influence. This inner psychological landscape, created in some a fundamental insecurity which pushed them to work harder, manifested in an outward need to keep proving themselves – 'I really am good' –initially to parents and family members and then later to referred others like head teachers in school. This transferred relationship (Racker, 1968) from parent to head teacher maintained an externalized need to perform. School provided the avenue for these efforts. Some, as I have stated previously, felt they had to compete from a position of 'second best' in their respective families. This did not always equate with being the second child, although it was a factor for some, but the sense of being the underdog inspired many to push extremely hard when they entered the professional arena.

*'And I wanted to be perceived as successful in my job as a head teacher, you know, I wanted people to think I was very successful at running the school, I wanted the school to be seen as successful, popular with parents and all that sort of stuff but I wanted to do it my way (laughs) and not the way that other*

*people were telling me to do. I don't know whether there was ever a point where I sort of said "I am going to be successful, I am going to be very competitive" I just was. I didn't really think about that until quite a long time afterwards, I thought well why was that? And I think it was probably to do with my experiences early in life. Participant C.*

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The last extract is from participant C, relating his early childhood experiences to headship. His sister was seen as both academically and professionally more successful and this had informed his childhood narrative – ‘they compare siblings you know’. This sibling relationship, although not altogether conscious, was a source of competition which I think is highlighted by him because it is a significant driver for his later aspirations.

Early experiences were directly and explicitly linked by others to the strategies they had developed to manage as a head teacher.

*‘It was, as a baby, just being peed off with being poked so yeah it stems from there definitely. And actually if you want to relate that back that was one of the hardest points of the headship was the public face of it and actually standing up in front of parents and doing the assemblies that I actually found hard and the personal judgements they were making against m. But now, in probably quite a sadistic way, I enjoy that part of it. I have realised for me it is all about being prepared, being in control, being organised, don't ever put me on the spot, prepare me and I am fine.’ Participant E.*

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Some participants had experienced feelings of being out of control in childhood. Education was a source of consistency, which allowed them to take some control of their circumstances, when other areas of their young lives were far from predictable. This in some respects amounted to a strategy for psychological survival.

Some felt they had to take control. It was a word that featured strongly in the discourse that many used. Being in 'control' was perceived as advantageous because it avoided underlying doubts and insecurities associated with the more precarious psychological and social positioning that some had previously experienced in childhood.

These strategies provided some with a template for later 'success' and a quick rise to headship. The downside was, for some, the formation of a 'workaholic' attitude and considerable sacrifice in their personal lives to maintain control and equilibrium at work. This is an observation I will return to in later chapters.

Self esteem and self worth was located within the role and within the school, particularly for those who had limited institutional experience outside of this domain. Their prospects for future progression once they had started teaching were rather limited to headship or deputy headship. Many did not feel their skills would be easily transferable to other sectors, and their considerable efforts were therefore rather restricted to a narrow path which pushed them further up the organizational hierarchy – even if they were not sure that this is what they wanted (none of the participants actively had wanted to be a head teacher when starting their careers).

Essentially, what I think is demonstrated throughout the stories of participants, is that professional capacity is profoundly linked with early experience, and this includes capacity for leadership. It became apparent that many participants could be predicted to rise to management or leadership positions by nature of their very early (and frequently troublesome) experiences, even before they had left school to start their professional careers.

### **Professional Influences**

There were remarkably very few accounts of the experience of teaching. However, what did emerge was a considerable amount of narrative about head teachers who participants' had worked for as teachers or worked alongside as peers. The descriptions were generally far from positive. Accounts of emotional bullying, incompetence, corruption, ill health, suicide and breakdown provided a backdrop to the wider profession that was deeply concerning.

These formative professional experiences, both positive and negative, were important it seemed in the formulation of the profession and the role-in-the-mind of individuals. 'Bad' experience of head teachers who were seen as 'disasters' by some were also recalled as teaching valuable lessons - about what not to do as a head teacher.

Rather interestingly, as I have pointed out in previous chapters, the underlying identifications for some appeared to be with the 'not' very good people they described. They did not appear to be consciously aware of this. Although it is probably not surprising considering the limited experience of authority models available providing a restricted number of leadership models to identify with.

In some cases leadership styles were maintained in the mind because they had some familiarity with the previous authority models of participants; either parents or family, early experience or within school. Where there was not a similar historical model or internal map available, incongruent leadership styles were more easily discounted by participants as having no value for the individual concerned. It appeared that leadership or management models had to work with the individual's personality to be truly adopted. Where there was no 'valency' (Bion, 1968) or natural psychological hook, they were seen as problematic and rejected.

The significance of the descriptions of other head teachers is twofold; they provide us with a description of the wider environment in which the participants are also actors, and, because secondly, the denigration of other head teachers, was used as a method to elevate self and ones capacity in comparison. Some certainly felt esteemed to do the job because of the perceived inadequacies of others. A surprising number spoke of making the decision to consider headship when they realized they could do better than head teachers they had worked with.

*'I don't think I ever thought I would want to be a head teacher and I remember at college when we had a lecture on different leadership styles I just thought what's the point in this? But after I had been teaching for 6 or 7 years I worked with a head teacher, I was a class teacher then, and she*

*actually had MS. But she would let people know but she actually didn't talk about how it impacted on her work particularly and in an assembly one day she was desperately trying to read this story to the children, and it is hard reading a story and keeping eye contact with a whole group of children, and it was a real disaster and although I knew she had got MS and I knew that that was a contributory factor I just thought 'my god I wouldn't do it like that' and I think that for me was the point when I thought I want to get into leadership and management more and it's really clear in my mind.'* Participant A.

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The realisation that one can do better than ones (organizational) parents, may reflect something of the family type dynamics that exist in primary schools and may well be very relevant to other organizations. It appeared to be an important and highly significant factor in authorising self to take up authority and leadership functions – an internal sense that they had moved beyond or could do better than others in more senior positions. Comparing self with others gave them authority to consider and apply for the role of head teacher. Some, the fast track head teacher for example (participant D), came to this realization within her first year of teaching, others took longer, but many spoke of the evaluation of others and themselves in comparison before making the decision to be a head teacher.

Others felt authorized with the positive affirmation of mentors or managers. There were positive recollections of mentoring, accounts of good experiences of leadership and support and encouragement from head teachers while a teacher. This demonstrated how individuals were socialized into the profession and how they developed a sense of professional values and ideas about the role of teacher and Headship of a school. All of them found someone who was helpful or who they admired or who they identified with in some way and these were recalled as a great source of support and inspiration. Participants were frequently identified by someone within the



organization as having the likely characteristics for leadership, and this provided a level of permission or institutional authorization to move into and attempt a more senior role.

Although it is beyond this study, I did want to note that the relationships described with parental figures appeared to have a similar patterning to leadership style. More recently appointed head teachers appeared to have a more 'avoidant' (Bowlby, 1969) attachment style in their management approach: it appeared generally in the systems they were working in to have some benefit. The systemic point is the one I will come back to later.

### **Defences and Resilience.**

All spoke of someone in their childhoods who appeared to believe in them and want the best for them. In this sense, whatever the experiences early on the parenting appeared to be 'good enough' (Winnicott, 1953). It was a key resilience factor which stayed with each of them throughout their lives. This was another reason for the prominence of childhood memories in all the narratives.

*'But you know a sense of how lucky I am is important. And sharing that, I do feel like, it sounds very gushy, but I do feel like with my parents and upbringing and wider social context I have had a lot of love shown to me and given to me and opportunity and positivity kind of put into the pot as it were and I do feel that that motivates me and I have that capacity to then kind of give it back out again.'* Participant D.

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Many appeared to have the capacity to survive difficult circumstances and persevere in spite of these difficulties on route. Some had become self sufficient and independent at an early stage and had used this as a strategy for managing for much of their lives.

*'I don't like relying on anybody else for anything, I always knew I wanted to go out and earn a living and support myself. A lot of my friends went off and their ambition in life was to marry somebody who would look after them or*

*something stupid like that and I couldn't think or anything worse, it is just not the sort of person I am. You come in to the world on your own and you go out of it on your own, you make the most of it don't you?' Participant E.*

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This account, and there were others who had adopted similar stances, was suggestive of an absence of a psychological model for interdependence. The preferred model in the mind is of independence and individualization. It had advantages but also highlighted potential difficulties. Self sufficiency was a perception that had some advantage in leadership roles increasing self reliance and the capacity to manage or be self managing – a necessary component of management. It maybe representative of a 'type' of self management that is required to work in contemporary schools, both in the classroom and in headship, where the capacity for self sufficiency is seen organizationally to be of value. However, it appeared at heart, for some, to be a defensive formation indicating the need for strong defences to be able to manage in current organizational context.

These were clearly the attributes which had drawn some participants' through the organizational ranks. However, this strategy appeared to flounder when a more collective networked response was needed. Here, more inclusive collaborative strategies appeared to be more effective. This way of working would require a significant adjustment for some in the underlying psychological basis for leadership, while others were already well adapted from their previous backgrounds.

These participants (participant B and D) generally had a more open experience of childhood, as we have seen through descriptions of extended family and community involvement. This supported another 'type' of leadership style which would later provide a model for a collaborative working. For example; in childhood, the community was perceived as being supportive and helpful to participant B. She uses community and professional networks extremely effectively as a head teacher perceiving her role not so much in terms of self sufficiency but as a coordinator of community resources.

## The forces of Destiny

*'I think a lot of what's happened to me in teaching I have felt has been about being in the right place at the right time.'* Participant A.

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After being afflicted with deafness, Beethoven is reported to have said, *'I will seize Fate by the throat'* and there was this quality to some of our participants' narratives: an absolute confidence and certainty in their own destiny to succeed and do well. This did not seem to be purely based on confidence in their skills alone. It felt like something more than this, an internal concept of self that extended beyond them into the future, giving them a sense that no matter what occurred they would win through. Others, as in the brief extract above, had a far more fatalistic understanding of their circumstances.

The stories of participants' revealed how powerful early psycho social templates were for later character structure, as these appeared to be formed very early. There were some very different perspectives articulated by participants as they approached their future careers. These were differences which fitted with the ideas of Christopher Bollas (1989) and his use of the concepts of fate and destiny. Bollas develops an axis of thought between the two in a way that was very relevant to this study and the participants' descriptions of their life trajectories and their future aspirations.

Through Winnicott's (1960) ideas of 'false self' and 'reactive living' and Kleinian (1946) ideas of early objects relations, Bollas draws our attention, through the use of classical literature, to the difference between fate and destiny: *'One can fulfil one's destiny'* he tells us if *'one is fortunate, if one is determined, if one is aggressive enough.'* (1991:31). Destiny, therefore, is linked to action. Fate is altogether a different proposition, which sees man's life as being formed much more by the elements, the turn of events that one meets in a lifetime which dictate the path that is followed.

Some of these biographical participants were fatalistic about their progression. Their narratives suggested that they had been 'in the right place at the right time', revealing an underlying impression that they had been blown by the winds of fortune to their current destinations and

positions. Bollas (1987) suggests this position is formulation of someone who has never found their true self – that is, a self that is matched to their internal idiom – because the external environment has never been conducive (he focuses on the early relationship with mother). This person frustrated to the ‘core’, splits off aspects of his true self and thereby externalises internal objects which then fate their lives.

*‘I got the acting deputy headship and it was a kind of awkward situation, because there was me and another teacher who was similarly experienced but this head had clearly already made up her mind that she wanted me to have the job, not the other person so although we were both interviewed, she had already spoken about it reasonably publicly as my job so there was a bit of kind of just being in the right place at the right time and being the person that somebody wanted.’ Participant A.*

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Others had a very different perspective; they were far more determined to forge their own path. Destiny in comparison, according to Bollas (1987) seeks to find a way irrespective of the ‘enchainments’ of experience. He describes how parts of self remain inside the person – not split off – but more integrated, giving them a sense of direction. An internal map which provides direction, furnishing an individual with a sense of having created their own life as they progress and develop within it, irrespective of social, cultural and familial circumstances (which clearly they cannot control).

It was a strikingly different psychological position, which had ramifications for the personal authority participants’ would bring to the role and how they would manage later hardships and difficulties. They knew they would achieve. They felt they were destined to do something and set out to do it. This belief in self was extraordinarily powerful in supporting them in difficult times. Overall, it appeared a far stronger position. They appeared to believe that, in spite of difficulties, they were if not the master of their own destinies, at least an active player.

*'Yea well the minute I heard about fast track I was totally and utterly sold on it, it sounded brilliant and totally up my street. I can remember sitting in my classroom on the internet doing a self assessment questionnaire you could do about this fast track thing and I remember doing that and just by the pitch of the questions, yea too bloody right this is for me, this is it.'* Participant D.

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Bollas suggests that some individuals have the capacity to project forward an internal image of self into the future and then move towards this image. In this way, he suggests that we are *'ever so slightly led by our projections'* (1987:35). It is an interesting concept and one that appeared to have great relevance to the stories of some participants and their approach to leadership.

## **Conclusion**

I have become increasingly aware that individuals make life choices in multi dimensional ways. The perception that the various agents we have considered can be assumed to be responding as rational or passive actors in their own life histories are false. The decision to be a teacher therefore is multi dimensional: a combination of early childhood, parental and family expectations, early environment and social and organizational circumstances as well as self belief. Here, in varying degrees, the choice to teach appears both values driven for some and driven by aspiration for others, both a vehicle for a social conscious and also a platform for social and class progression.

What appeared to be shown was the interaction between the 'known' and 'unknown' or partially forgotten aspects of participants' experience. This unconscious pool of internalised knowledge, experience and emotion would have powerful impact when connected to later professional experiences. Indeed, what was suggested by many narratives is that deeply rooted emotional experience profoundly and continually impacted on the thinking and decision making of those in role.

Each in their own way navigated a course within a changing social and economic environment, through a series of transitions to their current role. These landscapes had a powerful effect. None

described having this outcome in mind. What was apparent, however, was that their individual trajectories from childhood to school and from school to adulthood was used as a framework to understand their work, which also supported the formation of the organization they would hold in their minds as head teacher – this equates with the description of the organization-in-the-mind extended by Hutton, Bazalgette and Reed (1997). In education, one is continually involved in a negotiation with one's own childhood, one's own early professional environment and these internal models or scripts for some were at odds with the environment they were currently working in. I shall consider the implications of this in the next chapter.

## Chapter 13

### Stress

#### Overview

Stress, mental distress, mental and physical breakdown were recurrent themes in all interviews, and within this there was a recurring theme of isolation and a lack of organizational containment (Menzies-Lyth, 1997). Many of the head teachers interviewed appeared to be lonely in role. Some, however, appeared to fare better than others.

This chapter will explore the issue of stress as it emerged within the discourses of participants and again, like the previous chapter I will try and discern some collective understanding. To orientate ourselves: although at no time was stress mentioned as part of the initial question or as part of the introduction to the research project, it was part of the sub questions I wished to consider:

What are the types of strategies head teachers have deployed in relation to leadership, organizational change and stress?

What are the kinds of psycho social patterns which intersect in head teachers' understanding and experience of stress?

Does limited institutional experience confer greater vulnerability on head teachers in their role as leaders in schools?

Does the participant manage their role well?

The incidence of stress was a consistent feature across almost all interviews. Even those who appeared to be doing well in role spoke of difficult times or described as a backdrop to their narratives other head teachers who were struggling with ill health and stress. The organization of school sounded at times like an emotional war zone, with many damaged and distressed individuals populating the professional constituency.

Within this chapter I have tried to distil some of the themes from the interviews in relation to stress and draw some analysis from this. There is no neat answer to any of the questions I set myself,

rather a series of overlapping factors which impacted on individuals. What was clear is that there was a particular cohort of head teachers who appeared more vulnerable to stress arising from changes within the profession and specifically a more managerial approach to schools management. What I have tried to demonstrate is the level of complexity, the interrelations and interconnections between internal and external experience and how, amid the changing contexts of primary school education, complex negotiations are required in a continued need to adapt to the work environment. Recognizing the limitations of a single chapter, I understand that any one of these areas would be worthy of further and more detailed exploration.

### **The Individual: Personality factors.**

The constant negotiation between self and childhood is a potential source of stress. Teachers, like other child care professionals, are in a situation where psychologically they are always faced with a representation of themselves as a child, rather than an adult's projection of an internal aspect of themselves as a child. Many chose the work because of this, and knowingly or unknowingly, these identifications can be painfully felt. Old anxieties and complex emotions brought up within the day to day work schedule appeared just under the surface within the narratives of many of the participants'. The emotional minefield of school that Obholzer (1995) describes is also seeded by teachers and head teachers' own experiences which, when reawakened in the service of the task, appeared to have repercussions for the individual concerned.

Early childhood experience was significant in later perception and resilience to stress. Difficult early experiences were both a source of motivation but also indicative and predictive of later difficulties – BNIM focus groups predicted later breakdown as possible future events for two participants (C, E).

Participant C, Peter, gets into difficulties following an increase in community unrest (gun fire was heard twice in the months before he leaves the school). He finds himself, after an argument with a child's parent, wandering the streets unable to make a decision in circumstances reminiscent of his own uncontained and neglected childhood. Participant E, Suzanne, finds herself close to a breakdown after continual difficulties with a parent who is both attacking and rejecting of her. This



reawakens her early experiences of adoption and hospitalisation, with associated feelings of rejection, judgment and intrusion. She finds herself rocking in a foetal position under her desk.

This, in part at least, is what the individual brings to the work: anxieties that can be triggered by the work environment when an individual's underlying and unprocessed experience is detonated by an exposure to circumstances not dissimilar to their early experiences. These experiences provided a high level of empathetic understanding of children, but, unmetabolized, they remained in the psyche, a continued source of motivation and commitment but also a vulnerability which could be activated at anytime - the Achilles heel I spoke of in earlier chapters.

Those participants considered in earlier chapters, who by motivation were subjectively close to children, appeared to be more available to the projections of others (Klein, 1946). This was one of the characteristics for choosing, and no doubt, being good at the work. Being sensitive in this way provided powerful empathetic understanding, but was fraught with difficulty: the avenue by which some had become overwhelmed and emotionally saturated by the work environment. In this way, the internal and external boundaries of experience can become blurred and the sense of self is corrupted by continued exposure to the raw emotional product of the work environment. I perceived this group or type of participant to be most affected by the changing organizational structure and the reduction in the level of support (or containment offered) by the organization.

There is another hazard. While a level of identification with children was useful, it also led to distortion and a reduction in the capacity to interpret situations and data in reality or current perspective. Seen through the optic of the previous personal experience of the role holder, a whole host of associated experiences maybe brought to bear which is not helpfully related to, or in reality linked with, the current situation. The disavowing of personal experience, seeing disturbance in self as a property of the children that a service is being provided for, highlights another danger that identification can bring.

Where there was a separation between the value base of the individual and the perceived value base of the organization, the resultant dislocation could be problematic; undermining authority,

esteem, and any sense of being valued within the organizational paradigm. This was an ongoing antagonism that resulted in difficulties and stress for some, leading to a deep sense of alienation at times from both content and context (Miller, 1997). The larger the perceived gaps between the values base of the individual and the values of the organization, the greater the struggle.

*‘ So I was always, even from about 1992 onwards, you know I felt myself in conflict with a lot of what I was being asked to do. And I suppose that doesn’t help because if you are constantly doing something that you don’t really like or you try to find ways of avoiding (laughs) doing what is required of you then that causes some conflict and tensions which, you know, isn’t particularly good for your state of mind.’ Participant C.*

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The personal model of school held in the mind by Peter, participant C, is increasingly in conflict with a changing organizational environment which causes him friction and great personal stress. It is a conflicted and increasingly desperate position.

Understanding the psychological contract with the work provides a clue as to why some appeared to struggle and others did not. The drive for reparation, which I considered previously as a source of motivation, can take on a manic quality: where individuals are driven to greater and greater acts, not from a position of depressive position (Klein, 1946) functioning but instead from a more primitive psychological state, the paranoid schizoid position. The internal and external need to be super parent could dominate the lives of some.

*‘People talk about teaching as a vocation but it has become even more than that for some people, you know, it’s life ruling; it rules their lives to the extent that it damages relationships. A lot of marriages break up between teachers; it damages relationships with their children’. Participant C.*

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The reparative quality of the work for participants had many potential benefits to the individual and the organization. A personal benefit when children were doing well because aspects of self had been invested in their development. The seeds of one's own experience can produce fruits in the service of self and others: rewards from the act of work, which in turn complements and confirms the individual's perception of themselves and what they do. Indeed, on this basis all work is at some levels reparative in nature.

The problem appears when there is limited effect from the efforts of the worker. Where greater effort is made but to no avail, a natural and understandable frustration ensues. In this situation, the work task may no longer be felt to be helpful or fulfilling. There is a danger here that the wider perspective can get lost. Instead of trying to 'repair' from a mature position of knowing and accepting the limitations of professional involvement, the worker tries to 'fix' things - potentially an impossible task (Roberts, 1994), no longer linked to the reality of the situation. In these circumstances, the drive to repair aspects of 'self' through reparative working overrides more reasonable and realistic aims, thus pushing teachers or head teachers motivated in this way to greater and greater efforts.

Phantasised omnipotence is difficult to quell when individual and systemic pressures converge without a clearly defined, or realistic, organizational boundary to restrain the understandable but problematic urge to try and make good. Some struggled to keep up with their own ideals (which frequently fitted with group and community expectations) and this was a considerable burden to them.

An overpowering sense of guilt spurred some of our participants onwards (*'I don't know where I have got this amazing guilt from'* - Participant D), with an almost obsessive quality. A compulsion to repair that when thwarted resulted in the return of the, hitherto repressed, depressive anxieties and early experiences that it had sought to defend against.

Some had not looked after themselves very well; instead, they had prioritised their work over family and in some cases over their own health, sacrifices which some appeared to feel the role of head

teacher demanded. This in some revealed a masochistic tendency which amounted to a repetition of earlier damaging experiences, drawing suffering towards an individual which, over a period of time, caused difficulties at work as others tuned into this aspect of their personality.

These dynamics arising from an individual's inner world are not, I think, the whole story. They are I believe, indicative of the organization-in-the-mind and need to be understood simultaneously with the desires and demands of the organization.

In this way, the organization can also be seen to engage in a level of manic reparation: pushing head teachers and schools with continual demands for better performance when the reality of the circumstances is unlikely to yield the required results. What is also revealed perhaps is society's deeply held ambivalence about children and a need to repair the perceived damage we have caused them (Feuchtwang and Ramsay, 1995). The current environment in schools did not appear to support the act of true reparation. There was a sense that not succeeding or having limitations was the equivalent of a modern day sin.

*'They would say if you don't do it, and your results aren't very good, you will be blamed (laughs) for this. And so that was all quite difficult because I worked in an area where, you know because of the social-economic factors around the school, the results were never going to be up there.'* Participant C.

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This was not just governmental or local authority pressure, although certainly present. It was also pressure from the local community and parents, who can also push their burdens into and onto schools. The continual need to do better dominates the system. It appears to be an institutional defence (Menzies Lyth, 1997, 1989) which denies the reality and limits of the task by avoiding societal childhood inequalities and realities, which is hidden behind persistent claims of fairness and equity for all in future life opportunities. A belief which seems best summarised in the words, *'it will all be OK if we all work harder'* keeps at bay deeply held anxieties about future life chances for children.

Pushed in term of role and pushed in terms of organization, head teachers are also pushed in terms of self. This is a potent combination. It could result in a successful school. Or it could push the role holder beyond their limits, with both predictable (from future blind BNIM analysis) and, at times, dire result. Criticism or any failing or rebuttable appeared to be acutely felt and was defended against through working harder, even when participants' recognised this was unrealistic. This line of thought takes us back to Jaques (1955).

*'Institutions are used by individual members to reinforce individual mechanisms of defence against anxiety and in particular against recurrence of early paranoid and depressive anxieties'* (Jaques 1955:478).

A harsh super ego, an internalised parental voice pushing some to 'succeed', had made them successful, but it had also caused them considerable difficulty. Under pressure to deliver results from the wider structure, which as Cooper and Lousada (2005) suggest is also superego driven; many pushed themselves to psychological extremis. I do not think the resultant stress of these converging forces – personal and institutional - can be underestimated.

There was frequently a recognised need for support, although actually receiving help appeared to be another matter. A double jeopardy: not only did acknowledging vulnerability put some in touch with earlier feelings of not feeling good enough, it was also not felt to be organizationally 'safe'. Consequently, it had to be defended against, avoided by denial, self sufficiency and omnipotence, defences that made it impossible to ask for help. Vulnerability, if acknowledged at all, was outsourced, seen or projected (Klein, 1946) into others. Some were, in this sense, their own worst enemies.

Narcissism and omnipotence (Schwartz, 1990) are often linked. In leadership this can be healthy, leading to determination, drive and ambition. It can become unhealthy when it leads to narcissistic blinding. In circumstances where there are no organizational parental figures to modify narcissism, the primary task maybe lost and a new one installed - meeting targets at all costs.

Fischer (1983) draws attention to the illusion of grandiosity. Linking it to the idea of unconditional omnipotence, he suggests those experiencing burn out maintain high self esteem through clinging to these illusions, which is then afforded to their professional activity. He concludes that when ‘a choice must be made, people often value their self esteem above their physical existence.’(1983:45).

*‘I just literally went to the doctors and broke down and she actually said to me, the only thing I can do, and I am going to do (this happened in the March), I am going to sign you off until September. I said you can’t do that, I am back at work on Monday!’ Participant E.*

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Freudenberger (1975), the first person to describe burnout, referred to people who were overly committed and excessively dedicated who believe they are indispensable and must do everything by themselves. An idealisation of work, he suggests, at great cost and consequence when lost. Those professions idealised by wider society, would appear at higher risk of this dynamic. Again, we can see an overlapping of personal and institutional factors that result in a pattern of splitting (Klein, 1946) between idealisation and denigration, resulting in a social and institutional climate where some are perceived as ‘super heads’ and others are placed in ‘special measures.’

Head teachers (during interviews) felt blamed for problems that occur inside the classroom and outside of it. This may be a result of wider changes in society and shifts from the idealisation of professionals, including teachers, who may now be subject to a societal backlash for ‘*failed dependency*’ (Miller 1993:103). The pressure for teachers and head teachers to provide for dependency needs are considerable and because of this, there is always going to be a level of disappointment. However, the changing nature of the institution means that schools are becoming unavailable for these types of projections; the underlying psychological task is thereby obscured resulting in disappointment and conflict at the boundary of the organization.

The pressure to act in certain ways in an organizational context is pervasive. We want, as a society, for head teachers to be many things. There is a great pressure for those in leadership positions in

school to act in certain ways on behalf of the group. A dynamic which can be applied to all leaders: a kind of unconscious continental drift can ensue which finds the role holder unthinkingly acting to 'type' or being pulled into acting in unfamiliar ways on behalf of the group. In this way, the uncharacteristic angry outburst of Peter towards a parent can both be understood as an individual expression of anger and stress and, simultaneously, as a response on behalf of the whole group-children and staff.

I would like to suggest that when an individual is continually forced to work against their psychological valencies (Bion, 1968) either in a sophisticated or unsophisticated way, it can result in significant stress. This is caused either by acting in unfamiliar ways or in resistance to these. Either way, they are pushed back on their own defences because they are unable to share an organizational one. Menzies-Lyth (1997) suggested that those nurses that did not naturally share the institutional defences of the organization would probably leave quite soon after starting their careers. This is perhaps more problematic, when the incumbent like head teachers are already established in their careers and perceive they have few career alternatives.

Participants chose their profession because of their personality characteristics – conscious and unconscious. This is the psychological skeleton we bring to work. But these characteristics are both fostered and fed by institutional and group processes. This match can be beneficial; smoothing the professional path for many, but within changing organizational climate the interface between the individual and organization is continually adjusted. As different pressures are brought to bear, the earlier connection with the work role can be lost, and a shift in the underlying nature of the group can leave some individuals stranded, dislocated from their initial motivations to the work and at risk of breaking down.

### **The need for control and the pressure to get it right**

Performance anxiety was a cause of stress. Head teachers, linking to the last section, are expected to have the answers. They have a particular symbolic role in school, in society and in the communities they work in. When faced with difficulty, this appeared to make it difficult to ask for help. These

group projections were largely welcomed by them, inviting aspects of themselves which they felt comfortable with (professional success and competence), while denying the source of anxiety - the fear of failing – which kept them locked into realising group expectations while denying their own needs and vulnerabilities.

One major source of stress appeared for some to be the very drives that had been the original motivation and impetus for professional progression. Great efforts had provided a potent model for professional success but became problematic when participants were overwhelmed or were unable to 'succeed'. Faced with potential 'failure' they were thrown back to childhood: the site, for some, of early narcissistic wounds. In response many pushed themselves even harder, an early and learnt defensive strategy which took some to the point breakdown:

*'Looking back on it, I don't recognise myself as that person. I remember the day I went home was the day I tried to put a page break in a document and I couldn't make a page break go in and it was awful. But you know that's not why I was ill, it's quite hard to think this built up and this built up but I know I was really unhappy.'* Participant A.

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Educational achievement had for many been associated in childhood with acceptance. An indicator of recognition, and success in family and community networks, and, as such, it was for many a major site of self esteem and self worth. Achievement for some came first and acceptance second, a highly conditional equation replicated in the organizational setting with authority figures or systems of authority. Again, this was a dynamic that was reinforced by insular professional experience, if there were limited points of identification outside education, there was increased dependency for self esteem and self worth on educational 'success'.

The level of stress experienced reflected, at times, the participants' need and desire for control, a discourse that was prominent in narratives and, as I have suggested previously, connected to their rise to headship. Where there was a threat to control or where there was considerable uncertainty



in the environment, this appeared to have considerable impact. For some, this was linked to significant incidents from their own life experiences where they had felt out of control. When control and mastery were compromised, they struggled. There were many examples, but here are two which illustrate:

*'I suppose bring it down to my illness, bring it down to the adoption whatever, I hadn't been in control of those things and I didn't like it. And therefore I felt I had to control and the biggest thing, I don't know if this is connected at all - I don't know where it has come from, but the biggest problem and the lesson that I am here on this earth to learn is patience. I have absolutely no patience. I have with the children and I can sit and teach a child multiplication. I have got that sort of patience but I want everything done now and so many things have happened in my life where I have tried to rush them and they have gone wrong.'* Participant E

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*'It's not really that important but my biggest problem with the cancer was not having the cancer, it was not being able to see an end to it and so even though everything is fine in my head that door can never be closed. I can never put that away because for the next 20 years I have to keep going for check-ups and going for tests, bla bla bla, all the kind of usual stuff that is associated with kind of that sort of illness. That is my biggest issue with it, the fact that I can't move on from it because, you are unable to move on from it, because next month I go to hospital and I have a full day's check-up and three months after that I go and it's just always there. And I do like things to kind of, I do like to know what it looks like at the end and I can't with that and*

*it is the same way as with the budget. I don't know what it looks like at the end until I fully understand it. Once I know that it will be easy.'* Participant F.

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Kernberg (1985) draws our attention to the obsessive personality qualities and the need for control in senior leaders in the corporate sphere, observing that this characteristic can be helpful to organizations, enabling them to function efficiently. However, he observes that under stress, pathological defence mechanisms and pathological personality traits are activated, resulting in obsessive perfectionism and a pedantic style at critical moments, which has serious implications for the organization, often fuelling additional stress for self and subordinates. Peter, participant C, reflects back on his breakdown at work,

*'I think work became an obsession and also you know I had to do certain things in certain ways.'*

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The organization-in-the-mind of individuals offered insight into the control mechanisms used by the wider organization to maintain standards (or defend against chaos and societal breakdown) in schools and the strains it was placing on head teachers and staff who struggled to speak about the reality of their situation. When they did, it revealed gaps left between the subjective and managerial experience of the work, predictably resulting in disillusionment and stress.

*'Primary heads are always in the situation of knowing there are important things that they are not doing. Things they are responsible for but they are not doing them. And that is a cause of real anxiety and can be a cause of stress and you can't meet all the demands so you have to make decisions about what not to do but all the time, you are thinking 'I haven't done that, and I haven't done that, I should be doing that' and you go to head teachers' meetings and head teachers' courses and there are head teachers' talking there as if they are doing all of it and you think, oh god I should be doing that*

*and I'm not, but if you talk to head teachers everybody that goes to the meetings thinks that they are the only one (laughs) that isn't coping and this is true of teachers as well. They don't think they are coping with the pressures and that other people are but, actually, if you look 80% of them know they are not coping and I think that is particularly true of head teachers'. They have responsibilities for health and safety that they know they are not doing, responsibilities for the welfare of pupils that they know they are not fulfilling but because the Government's agenda is so driven by standards and test results, preparing for OFSTED, all your energies tend to be focused into that area and very important things you know are not getting done.'* Participant C.

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Holding a position of high autonomy with limited support fitted with their personal qualities and expectations. In this leadership role self reliance and the capacity to work independently would reap significant benefit. As we have seen this was essentially one 'type' of person who was attracted to this type of role: self sufficient, driven, with a high need for control.

In small organizational systems, control can be maintained without considerable effort. However when systems and organizations expand – either in size or expected capacities – control is difficult to maintain. Other skills are required. This extension of task and role appeared to increase stress for some, others were able to adapt the role in their minds to manage in a different way, as we shall see later.

Drawing again from the ideas of Bolland (1987), those who had an internal locus of control, who believed in their own 'destiny', appeared to fare better than those who were more fatalistic in their perceptions. I think this is a key point in relation to resilience in leadership: believing events were a result of their own behaviour appeared to reduce the perception of threat, while at the same time provided confidence in their own ability to persevere even in difficult circumstances. Generally, this was a quality of those participants who had developed a belief and expectancy, through their early

experiences, that they could control their lives; it allowed them to feel comfortable even when they were uncomfortable because they had a sustaining belief in self. Those who had not had the same experience, even though frequently desiring control, appeared to see it outside of themselves in the hands of powerful others, or residing in fate, fortune or the hands of the gods. It left them more vulnerable.

## **The School**

Another way to think about the stressful experiences of participants' is to consider that they revealed something, not just about the individual but about the context they were working in. The descriptions of feeling overwhelmed, fear of failing, of continually getting it wrong, could also describe the emotional experience of many classroom teachers and pupils. It would seem reasonable to consider that there is a connection given the context they meet in. Education and learning will to a degree always be accompanied with anxiety (because it exposes individuals to uncertainty, fear of failure, and associated vulnerability).

A hypothesis emerges that the professional experiences of teachers and head teachers have become inhabited by the anxieties of the children and communities they provide a service for. Feelings aroused, fear of judgment, fear of failure, helplessness and powerlessness can spawn increasing cycles of panic and distress, disturbance which maybe acted out by staff or felt but not understood. These can be deflected onto others who are seen to be less able or capable, who then bear the shame, humiliations and burdens for the system.

The case studies reflect some of the communities and situations in which schools and head teachers were working.

*'It's something else that is causing the upset and I think at the moment because the area is going through re-generation and people are having to move there is a lot of anxiety, there is quite a lot of drugs, because drugs are cheaper than alcohol at the moment, and so there is quite a lot of drug abuse.'*

*Quite a lot of the mums taking slimming pills, amphetamines..... violence within the community it's not an easy community really for the families. There is everything in there and of course they do it all in front of their children and then we pick up the pieces'. Participant B.*

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More and more complex and risky exchanges between local populations and professionals are shifting into the expanding territory of the school, a growing chronological development evidenced within participants' narratives. Community pressures and stresses can become problems for schools to somehow coordinate and solve - those that managed this well galvanised support from wider agencies, whereas others, as we have seen, seemed to be weighed down by the burden.

Schools are expected to provide for the changing and developing needs of very young children with varied experiences and expectations. This again places strain on professionals to continually adapt to the changing needs of the client group.

*'Well I think as a class teacher you are always a class teacher and you are trying to move the children along further and when they have learnt something there is always something else to learn and I think now that I am in the position I am in where there are things, like we have review meetings with senior people from the authority. They come round so fast and then it's the next year and they come round so fast and it's almost, you are just kind of catching your tail all the time, although I can tidy my desk on a Friday and go home and leave a tidy desk and I can make a list of things I need to do and I can tick them all off because I have done them all in the grand scheme of things those things are going to crop up again in a week's time or a month's time or a terms time and so there is that air of never finishing which um, I guess I am used to but I still find that I am quite organised so I like to know*

*that I have done something and that it is done but of course it never is really...'* Participant A.

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And from another interview,

*'And in education you never finish do you? It's always more and more.'*  
Participant E.

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Education is a passport to future success and increased life chances, but in a rapidly changing social environment where we have witnessed the collapse of entire industries and secure employment prospects, schools have perhaps taken on greater significance and therefore have become more pressurised and loaded with anxieties of Government, communities and parents alike.

The key to a successful life lies in the labour market, and the key to success in the labour market lies in education. Education therefore is deeply linked with selection. It is a conclusion that emphasises the anxiety that exists in schools, the core of which lies in fears about future life chances and future survival – collectively we will all be, one day, dependent on the children of today. We want schools to provide year-on-year improvements, to provide us with good news and good results. However, this can become a collusive contract which is hard to question. Everyone wants successful schools. But do we really want reality? I suspect not. Schools provide an illusion according to Beck (1992), an illusion of upward mobility for all through education. Schools have never provided this and are never likely too. And yet we expect all children to meet the same standard, and schools are expected to deliver this illusion. This corresponds with Freud's view of Amentia (1970), a collective illusion in which we all invest. The danger is that within this collusion, reality is distorted or avoided. Interviews revealed that head teachers were trying to manage realities connected to the task which were hard to acknowledge in the wider system.

It is a belief system that supports and maintains an impossible task (Roberts, 1994). Some children are not going to be doctors or solicitors or teachers. To expect all children to meet the same

standards is unachievable and yet this is what we expect teachers and head teachers to deliver. The circumstances and limits of their work are not recognised by the defined task and because of this many will continually fail or distort practice to meet targets.

*‘And of course there is big pressure on schools to get those results up, so everything is done to try and inflate those test results, teaching to the test and all sorts of dubious practices I would say - Some of which are more or less cheating’. Participant C.*

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Societal aspirations are, in some respects, dependant on the children of today. We are all on a blind march towards a future horizon which is increasingly unpredictable, and which schools are expected to prepare our children for. However while acknowledging these anxieties, the task needs to be redefined or modified to more manageable proportions – helping children reach their potential set against their own abilities, would be one useful adaptation.

The current definition of task, which on one level is obvious, on another is far from clear. Indeed, the task of actually educating children was not mentioned a great deal in narratives. Perhaps it was a given and did not require much attention, or perhaps to head teachers this part of their work, the day in day out adjustments, was as invisible to them as a source of anxiety as death and dying was to Menzies (1989, 1997) nurses. The extension of the boundaries of work was focused on. We are already acquainted with stress arising from role overload and overwork - an ‘engineering model’ of stress which did have traction in some narratives as some participants understood increasing stress. The extension of parameters of task led to a lack of clarity about role and the boundary of self and organization. It did not appear to usefully convey to the role holder where their end and their beginning should be - either at work or outside of it. Linking to earlier points, it offered fertile ground for reparative omnipotence to ride rough shod over reasonable expectation, militating against work being contained within manageable proportions and preventing realistic evaluation of

self and task. In this way the lack of boundary around the organization was reflected in the lack of boundary of the individual.

The effect on head teachers maybe two fold. Omnipotence fuelled by individual and systemic projections creates unrealistic expectations and may result in attempts to enact societal fantasies. This, coupled with increasing demands from government, leaves head teachers vulnerable to an unreal, paranoid schizoid (Klein 1929, 1946) state of leadership, whose actual authority may not match the levels of responsibility attributed. A recipe, Obholzer (1994) reminds us, for professional burn out.

The mature ego is one that can define the boundary between what is inside and what is outside, and can control the transaction between one and the other (Miller and Rice, 1967). In recent years, there have been significant societal changes in home life and a blurring of boundaries between home and work, as people increasingly work long hours or work from home. Head teachers were no exception. Many worked at weekends and during the evening. In a life dominated by work (for some school had become home, and home school), work appeared to be the only source of gratification.

*'I would be taking work with me, on my laptop...and if I was on holiday, even abroad, I would be thinking about work all the time. Participant C.*

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No rest from work. 'A life without limits' a new advertisement reads, heralding the most up to date Blackberry device, and this is both what is desired but is also part of the increasing problem of stress. A life without limits can also mean work without limits, providing scant protection for the individual from themselves or the world of work.

*'I could see how this school could become her life and although that's very nice to have that commitment it will send you into an early grave and once you have gone you don't get any thanks for that do you.' Participant E.*

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The extension of computer technology was evident in the interviews: a vein that ran across the last two decades that made detailed assessment, examination, audit and inspections possible. It has been used to increase the scrutiny of schools. It did not seem to take away anything, adding to, rather than eroding the workload. This created more pressure for some and was felt to undermine both their authority and judgment as they had to provide data which, even when positive, was not always felt to convey the reality of the work. This discrepancy between the real and the prescribed aspect of the work was again a significant source of stress.

Some clearly used technology effectively. The business leader and math's specialist, participant F, Clive, used it to support his tightly drawn systems allowing him to keep a finger on the school pulse while feeding the organizational need for data. I suspect it pushed stress downwards. It would be worrying if he believed the data was reality – but he did not – recognising that underneath the statistics, there was considerable vulnerability.

Perhaps, technologisation is itself an institutional defence. It certainly held anxiety, but whose? Senior managers, the Government? It supported some head teachers, allowing them a degree of control but others appeared more ruled by the data hungry systems and without the economies of scale of their secondary school cousins, these smaller institutions in some instances appeared to struggle.

Policies, regulations, inspections and targets were the organizational 'support' that was offered to head teachers. This did, perhaps, offer containment to some through prescription, although the overall effect was generally more persecutory than helpful.

*'Um, well actually we were heading towards an OFSTED and the pressure that was put on the school was just ridiculously enormous and teachers were just absolutely caving under the pressure and I picked up one of these lovely viral infections, like what's going round at the moment, and I had about a four week illness where it was very unfortunate. It started with this viral infection*

*and then I had an allergic reaction to the penicillin they were giving me for the viral infection and it resulted in my face swelling up, that was the main effect. And so as a result I missed the OFSTED and there's no problem with teachers missing an OFSTED, apart from the personal stress that you cause yourself, and every time there is an OFSTED that takes place in a school there are people who aren't there. And because there is so much pressure piled on to an OFSTED it creates that sense of, I suppose dread.'* Participant F

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I was surprised that, generally, inspection practices were largely accepted by most of the newer head teachers as part of the job, although not necessarily liked or agreed with. None appeared to see it as being of help and generally all appeared largely cynical.

*'It's someone else hitting someone else over the head to check on something. And I don't know that it necessarily does help the children make the progress but it means that someone can say, well I did talk to them about that.'*  
Participant A.

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Jaques (1955) demonstrated how bad impulses can be projected into different groups as a defence against paranoid anxiety. Some groups become viewed as sources of trouble and thereby become identified as objects of attack. Schools may hold this underlying role for government, appearing to be the targets for regulatory sadism where regulators have inflicted excessive burdens on schools in attempts to control them.

*'David Blunkett was secretary of state and in this White Paper it said in the introduction, or early on in it, something along these lines, 'We intend to put teachers under unrelenting pressure to improve standards'. That was the sentence they used and boy did they. And they have put teachers under unrelenting pressure and it's got worse and I think when I saw that at that*

*time I thought, you know. It was full of the word partnership but partnership meant you will do what we want. It wasn't really about partnership, it wasn't about having a dialogue of the best way of doing things. It was 'we expect you to be partners with us and we will put you under un-relenting pressure to do that.' It wasn't really a partnership at all.'* Participant C.

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Education, apparently driven by the desire for individual 'choice' is itself a product of social and societal discourse, which often articulates values of the corporate world - which schools and head teachers' are expected to model, disseminate and comply with. As such, they are also exposed to these processes of scrutiny and control themselves, which increase the levels of paranoid anxiety within the system. Underlying fears about social chaos represent powerful political drivers to establish and maintain systems of control through schools, and again we have a sense of them sitting on the edge of the class system, subject to the tensions and anxieties at the threshold. The organizational need for control is reflected in the individuals' need and drive for control seen throughout all interviews. This was part of the unconscious selection criteria.

Businesses are driven by competition to create profit. Increasingly, education is exposed to the same endless process of production – producing pupils for increasingly complex labour markets. The danger is that unlimited and unrealistic drives for educational improvement expose teachers and head teachers to alienation, stress and suicide.

### **The Problem with Parents**

*'I had a really bad conflict with a parent one day and I think that was what really made me think, you know, you are not fit to be here. It took me a long time to come to that conclusion, this creeps up on you, you don't necessarily know, and so I was so bad that day I came away from school in the middle of*

*the day thinking I will just have some time off, I need some time off (laughs)*

*and I never went back.’ Participant C.*

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The overwhelming factor in relation to stress was incidents or contacts with parents, with account after account of difficult and challenging experiences. It seems astonishing that so few studies have identified this as a major source of stress. The absence in itself is perhaps enlightening. The nature of the task and the structure of schools may mean that it is difficult for head teachers’ to openly criticise or express negative thoughts about parents, because essentially they are stakeholders – and in some cases, governors.

This may reflect a wider societal difficulty which schools are left to grapple with: the role of the state in the parenting and education of children. The inter-personal tensions between head teacher and parents perhaps are reflective of a wider societal situation. Schools increasingly have a monitoring role in relation to children and, by extension, parents (who were the targets of many new initiatives participants’ spoke of). Amid this expanding portfolio, they are pitched against parents in many areas which hitherto they would not previously had a role. Differences in beliefs about child rearing and discipline are now potentially two aspects of multiple sources of friction. This incident occurred when I was waiting to interview participant F and is taken from my research diary.

*‘I am sitting in the waiting room with a glass of water. An Asian woman and her daughter sit opposite- they appear unsettled. For no obvious reason I start to feel anxious. A woman comes in (I assume she is a teacher) she is speaking loudly saying “She did not have a sausage!” The Asian woman is now shouting back, ; ‘Yes, she did! She does not lie you know!’ This dialogue is repeated and carries on for another few minutes with increasing intensity. The girl (who is about eight) has her eyes down looking towards the floor. We both sit silently as the argument escalates. The teacher leaves slamming a door- she looks to be at the point of tears.’ Research Diary- Interview notes September 2008.*

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There are a number of ways that this might be understood. The first is from an individual perspective. A key question is how well have participants' own parents been assimilated in their minds? Difficulties with participants' own parents did appear to make them more vulnerable to stress arising from this dynamic. In some ways they appeared to have brought the parental figure in their heads to work with them, affecting both their relationships with parents and how they took up the 'parenting' role as leader.

I sensed that reported conflicts on this relational axis were heavily influenced by this internal dynamic - those who described conflicted early relationships with their own parents (participants C, E, and F) appeared to also describe a level of conflict with parents as a head teacher. Consequently, and by extension, some also appeared to have difficulty in addressing authority figures in the wider organization which was seen a source of friction and denied or denigrated potential support. This again is representative of unconscious phenomena at play - referred earlier relationships transferred into the present (Racker, 1968) impacting on work performance and effectiveness.

Participants C and E both reported significant stress following an incident with parents. Participant C spoke of feeling neglected as a child, participant E was adopted, which has particular significance here.

*'And actually, if you want to relate that back, one of the hardest points of the Headship was the public face of it and actually standing up in front of parents and doing the assemblies that I actually found hard and the personal judgements they were making against me.' Participant E.*

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They were not the only participants that struggled with parents, but all participants' experiences of parenting appeared to have some impact on their relationships with parents and their relationship with authority in general.

The propensity for many of our participants to identify with children, while an obvious benefit and potential attribute, also created problems with relationships with adults: an over identification could

be in opposition to or at the expense of relationships with adults in general, and parents in particular. Participant F, for example, at points is very disregarding of parents, perceiving them to be of little benefit to his work at the school.

*'And that's generally how it works and I have always never really been interested in the parent side of things, of dealing with that on a daily basis, because I kind of think the more time you spend sort of talking to parents about what they perceive to be their personal issues, when in fact generally they are kind of universal issues but just coming at it from lots of different angles. I think my time can be spent working with the kids, making sure that they move on.'* Participant F.

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You will recall his narrative of childhood revealed a not dissimilar attitude,

*'It wasn't that my parents were pushy, they wanted the best and they provided opportunities but they were less than pushy when it came to my career.'* Participant F.

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Arguments over organizational or parental responsibility appeared to represent struggles over territory. Underlying these tensions were fundamental questions about jurisdiction: 'who knows best' or 'whose child is it anyway' were themes central to some of the disagreements. This is not altogether surprising. Primary schools represent a giving up or handing over of parental responsibility at the school gate. There may be a level of relief and guilt about this transfer for parents as well as deep ambivalence, competition and rivalry. For the head teachers interviewed at times this felt an enormous responsibility.

The issue of authority is paramount, but confusing. What is and where is the head teachers authority and responsibility? And what is the authority and responsibility of parents? I am not sure it is obvious. For example is it the teacher's responsibility to get the child a good exam result? And if it is

what happens to parents responsibility? When either crosses the boundary into the territory of the other – when teachers become parents or parents, teachers – there is going to be difficulties. The likelihood of this happening is high because the boundary around both, when it comes to education, is far from clear.

*'He was physically, no sorry verbally, assaulted by a parent. A very aggressive man had him up against the wall. The Head was off sick with stress and he came in to do a parents evening although he was registered off sick, he was signed off and this parent actually caught him and had him up against the wall and was laying in to him verbally about X,Y and Z.'* Participant E.

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This already complex dynamic appeared to be exacerbated in some instances where parents had been former pupils of the school themselves, returning with their children. Parents' perceptions of the school were loaded with their own experiences of these institutions as children. The potential for replaying some of these earlier conflicts or repaying earlier injustices appeared to be considerable.

For instance parents who have not had their own needs met may seek to have these needs met through their own children, and thereby generate dependent responses from and through schools. Essentially, society's failed dependency enacted through children.

There is another consideration. Children are, according to Beck (1992), the *'last remaining irrevocable, unexchangeable primary relationship'* (1992:118). Rather depressingly (but I suspect accurately) he points out that while partners may come and go, children have taken on a monopoly in companionship. Others, in an increasingly individualised society (which was certainly a backdrop to the research), cannot be relied upon, and children maybe the final *'alternative to loneliness'*. Amid the *'vanishing possibilities of love'*, they provide a *'re-enchantment'* arising directly and taking meaning from a wider *'disenchantment'* (1992:118). The importance of children because of this, he concludes, is rising. Schools are charged with safeguarding and providing a return on the emotional

investment of parents, and because of this dynamic their education and care is also charged with tremendous anxiety.

All head teachers spoke openly about parents. (One participant felt parents perceived themselves as 'experts' because they had been to school!) No other profession would appear to be faced with this rather unique dynamic. It is hard to think of any managers who sit so close to the boundary of their organization and who have such a visible and exposed public role, while holding such a valuable commodity.

### **Trapped in the World of Childhood**

The feeling that '*teachers have no transferable skills*' (Participant A) appeared to make it difficult for some to find a way out or at least have some sense of another avenue of work they could embark on. This left some feeling trapped or cornered, stuck in a profession and a role they felt maybe damaging to their health because they felt they had limited opportunity elsewhere. Even though independent individuals, many within the organization of the school had become very dependent, and in some ways institutionalised. This may be true of many workplaces. What was apparent in interviews was the degree the workplace had penetrated identity. Identity and sense of self had become, for some participants, completely entwined with work identity.

This was a kind of 'pairing' (Bion, 1968), which made it difficult to separate and leave the role, or to extract their personal world from their work role. This makes the issue of individual authority complex and difficult to negotiate and challenge. Suggesting that someone is not doing a good job is in these circumstances, like telling them they are not a good person. I feel this had some relevance to participants, a binding that was encouraged by the organization, making it difficult to acknowledge shortcomings, recognise organizational failing or to perceive any other choices of work.

Feeling trapped in the world of childhood by role/procedures/ projections of others left some feeling that they could not do anything else. What do head teachers do next? OFSTED inspector, LA Advisor – few appeared to view these as alternatives largely because they were perceived rather negatively.



Head teachers are in financially well paid and relatively high status positions which may be hard to give up. The security of tenure once afforded to educational employment has long since evaporated, with limited opportunities for those who are managing a 'failing school'. Their own professional colours, as it were, nailed to the school mast, with the knowledge that because of the school rating they have limited potency in the job market. Higher tolerance to stress may be obtained in these circumstances through the threat to career and income, although one wonders for how long and at what cost.

Those that had perhaps greater resilience had worked outside of the profession, in other professional fields, or had taken time off (for example having children). Others appeared to have higher vulnerabilities to stress arising from the work unless – and this was a key issue – there were significant sites of esteem and value in their lives outside education; be they friends in other professions or within their fields of leisure activity. Some, aware of the potential dangers, and with the support of consultants, were actively developing these areas.

*'So yes it was a pretty difficult time and now within the last year really I really feel I have got my life back and particularly in 08 I have really been proactive about that and joined a gym and really been making sure I leave at a sensible time and just letting myself off the hook.'* Participant D.

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'Letting yourself off the hook' and developing other areas of interest appeared to support some considerably in managing their own stress and health in work.

### **Anxiety and Containment**

All participants presented themselves as resilient people. Strong personal and institutional defences were needed to withstand the institutional exchanges outlined above; however, these simultaneously and paradoxically, appeared to make them more vulnerable. The self sufficiency many described indicated a predominance of basic assumption 'me-ness' (Lawrence, Bain, and

Gould, 1995), which is problematic in relation to containment. At times, each solitary story was hard to link to a wider story, and although school provides a holding environment for pupils, the same holding environment was not apparent for staff. There was no sense in many of the discourses of another person who was supporting the management within the organization. The question that kept arising was - where are the containing structures for head teachers? It was not clear.

Many, as I have previously stated, appeared to be lonely. Few mentioned friends or their lives outside of work. Neither did they appear to have a professional peer group which appeared to be available to them. Coaches and consultants were mentioned outside of the organization as providing coaching or role consultancy to some participants, although this too suggested an individualised notion of role in the mind. This could be an area of natural evolution which reflects the changing nature of support needed in schools. It could also be seen as maintaining an equilibrium, which keeps the nature of the problem conveniently disguised so the wider system can avoid taking responsibility.

The Trade Unions were mentioned in narratives. They were fundamental in Participant C's story and felt to be of some benefit but they were also problematic, as we have seen. They hardly featured in the narratives of newer head teachers interviewed, perhaps indicating the decline of unionised labour and the diminishing effects of Trade Unions overall in recent education policy. Trade Unions have receded at a time when other support has also been swept away, appearing to leave head teachers rather isolated.

It is very hard for leaders - or anyone for that matter - to manage emotions when under pressure. The outburst of participant C towards a parent demonstrates the interpersonal effects of stress. Other examples were provided by the frequent stories of bullying and inappropriate behaviour of other head teachers that were recalled in narratives. Support appeared largely on the informal fringes of the role frequently from secretaries or *in extremis*, doctors or counsellors. Interestingly, given their role, no one reported receiving support from governors. Indeed, school governors were

rarely mentioned, forgotten it seemed, or in one instance mentioned only when the interview was just about to end.

*'....so what I tend to do is I tend to say nothing and then go away and do what I want to do...but it's still frustrating when you go along to a (governor's) meeting and no one actually wants to know what is going on but they are supposed to know...'* Participant A.

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This would appear to be an organizational flaw which has created a gap: an absence of professional containment which was previously provided by the system. Paradoxically, at a time when professional support networks would mitigate some of the pressures on head teachers, they find themselves with limited support, and in competition with their neighbours and counterparts in other schools. This would imply that previous support structures have been damaged, leaving limited space for thinking about children, staff, or about one's own practice as a manager. Paradoxically, increasing responsibilities held by schools have, it appears, been accompanied by a reduction in support, which instead now takes the form of increased regulation.

As a result, the officially sanctioned management structure is weak. It was not seen as a source of support by any, not even in desperate circumstances. With no formal system of supervision there was no organizationally sanctioned route for the emotional experience of work, nowhere to explore it without judgment or without intrusion. Instead, it frequently appeared to be squeezed out through tightly drawn systems. Not accounted for, emotions were left trapped in the curriculum or in the individuals themselves – the length and emotional voltage presented in some of the interviews would appear to be testament to this. Newer head teacher's (participants D and F), as I have stated, appeared to largely accept this system and did not appear concerned by it, but both, interestingly, (and linking to the point above) were seeing consultants which they had employed themselves.

There was a perception, expressed in some interviews that stress is an individual problem. This relays something of the organization-in-the-mind and the wider individualised culture in education and society, but ignored systemic factors and complexity. It had the effect, in some cases, of leaving individuals isolated, believing that any failing was theirs. Strangely, when it came down to it, few really blamed the organization.

*'I saw something last week um.... it was a graph somebody showed me, a plotted graph of emotions as you are going through a period like that. And it just made me realise I wasn't on my own. I actually wasn't completely useless for feeling like this because a lot of experienced heads feel like that when it actually happens and it just so happens it happened within my first three months of being a Head.'* Participant E.

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Traditionally, anxiety is captured and held within the hierarchy of organizations. This can no longer be true of schools (or many other organizations that exist in modernity). Instead, what became apparent is a position of aggregation, separation and isolation. Responsibilities that are increasingly pushed into schools are monitored and inspected, providing relief for those higher up the organizational hierarchy, but apparently leaving anxiety wedged in the school itself. It has the net result of severing responsibility and ensuring contamination, infection or pollution does not spread to the wider system. It is not, on the face of it, a model of containment; it is a type of quarantine.

This model in the mind which influenced the management style of some was also indicative of how they would understand stress in themselves and indeed others; as an individual difficulty and therefore an individual weakness.

*'During that time I had some time off with stress, and I am very much of the belief that for me in that situation, I had control of that situation and I didn't handle it well and you know. I wasn't recognisable to me during that time but*

*I do think it was our relationship that caused that, but I do think there were other things I should have done. And although I think I have got more of an understanding and empathy for people when they are suffering with stress, I also get very frustrated when people try and put the blame on someone else because I made decisions about what I was going to do and one of those decisions was that if I didn't go back I would never go back to teaching.'*

**Participant A.**

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When faced with difficulties, some participants were thrown back onto childhood experiences and personal survival strategies. The most powerful example of this would be Suzanne's description of being on the floor rocking.

*'Physically sitting in my office on the floor rocking was the actual point I knew things weren't right. Shutting the door and just breaking down at school. I had never done that before, I had always gone home and showed emotion at home. But I just literally shut the door and sat in a foetal position on the floor and rocked and I thought this isn't right and if anybody had just walked in they would have thought I was absolutely nuts.'* Participant E.

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At these times, the idea of the organization can be lost. Paranoid thoughts prevail and thinking becomes difficult. Without space for reflection or an organizational frame that can be thought about, it is only too easy to see why stress is interpreted as an individual ailment by the individual and not a sign of a sick organization. Something which staff groups and organizations can collude with to avoid contamination or responsibility.

Safety is a key facet. One of Kahn's (1990) conditions for achieving psychological presence requires being able to be oneself or show oneself without negative consequences in the workplace. This was difficult for some. They were deeply alienated from the wider culture and the wider philosophy and

did not trust or have confidence in either the regulating authority or other head teachers. The socio technical system, therefore, appeared to inhibit rather than enable head teachers to be psychologically present in their work.

Asking for support went against the expectations of those around them, children, staff and community. This was again a classic Basic Assumption process (Bion, 1968). The group expectations, deeply rooted in unconscious group phenomena, pulled the head teacher, the focal point of the groups attention, into providing for the groups needs (in this case dependency). These expectations were difficult to maintain although also rather welcomed by some. Complemented by the push of their own experience, which made them dependable, it was a potential psychic trap which prevented them requesting and receiving support for themselves. The other position that some maintained was self sufficiency, (the belief they could do it all themselves) but this potentially denigrated their own feelings and the feelings of others and made accessing support problematic. A number of the participants were aware of the inter-connectedness of experience within the school and that their emotional state on any given day would have an impact;

*'I am acting from the minute I am in work at 8.00 in the morning to when I leave, if I have been up all night with (my son) xxxxxx, like this weekend he was up every two hours being sick, I have still got to go in with a smile on my face that Monday morning because if I don't in our school environment it spreads within minutes. It spreads between the staff and they are all grumpy with each other and then the kids pick up on it and they are a nightmare they don't want to learn anything'. Participant E.*

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If the head teacher is stressed, if the head teacher is sick, what cost for the school? Some appeared very aware of the potential impact.

*'Paradoxically though head teachers sometimes are suffering a lot themselves and sometimes they are the cause of considerable stress for other teachers because, as I say they pass on the pressure. Or because they are under considerable pressure themselves they react in an inappropriate way, they manage in an inappropriate way so they have a very bullying, aggressive style of management.'* Participant C.

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## **Conclusion**

Education holds and contains anxieties for wider society. Schools have the societal task of providing tools for their subjects to survive, and thereby contain anxiety about rivalry about competition, about future failure and success.

There are, I am aware, some inherent contradictions in this chapter: that in an increasingly individualised society and in an increasingly individualised and atomised organizational system, people seem to need more support. I suggest that one appears to beget the other because these needs are no longer provided or acknowledged within the environment and therefore require more attention.

Limited external experience and unrealistic demands for results reinforces the potential for leadership that is both fragmented and paranoid. Without a supportive framework, anxieties appear uncontained, increasing defensive responses internally into teaching staff or pupils and externally onto their employers and government.

Head teachers in this study had largely progressed through a succession of educational experiences to their positions as leaders of schools. Many had no experience outside of family or school of existing within other institutions. In this respect, they were products of a uniquely circular experience from family to school to university back to school - a dynamic that could intensify the identification with self and work and the potential emotional impact of the role.

The experience of the work in the descriptions given of others (and self) appeared to be viewed by participants' themselves, even when they had experienced high levels of stress, as mainly part of the pathology, lack of resilience or vulnerabilities of the individual concerned. Difficulties at work or stress were thus interpreted as problem for the individuals, following what would appear conventional wisdom (Maslach, 1997) and were not linked to possible deficiencies or weaknesses in the larger organizational system. Those who were drawn to this level of explanation would also seek their answers within the individual.

Within this paradigm, the organization is absolved but also deprived. This type of conclusion does not provide a robust or measured organizational response and instead leaves emotional disturbance firmly embedded in the individual, with the personal distress and organizational dysfunction this implies. A failure to understand the plurality and complexity of perspectives means that no deeper understanding of stress can emerge.

What this study highlights is that stress for this occupational group is far from a consistent feature or experience of the work – some appeared more susceptible, others more prepared more able to adapt to the current educational climate and indeed were in their own accounts thriving and revelling in the increasing responsibilities of the role. The reason for this is complex and multiple, but as I have tried to suggest it can only be grasped through a simultaneous understanding of the interconnection between the state of minds of the individual in role and the relatedness of this to their current positioning and occupational context. This process can either be supported or hindered by the structures or networks of support that are provided within organizational or social frameworks.



## **Chapter 14**

### **Changes in the Nature of Primary Schools.**

#### **Changes in the Nature of Childhood**

One striking difference between participants was the kinds of childhoods they described. Some, largely younger participants, had quite structured childhoods full of clubs and activities. In comparison, the eldest participant recounted a very different childhood world of little structure outside of school, days away with friends at scrap heaps or making things on his own at home. The worlds they had grown up in were very different.

The world of childhood and society's ideas about childhood are changing and, related to this, the world of education also appears to have changed considerably. This in itself is not surprising. Wider changes in society and the business world are intrinsically linked to developments in schools and education. All interviews reflected a sense of considerable societal movement, alongside changing expectations and pressures on schools and head teachers.

The self centred individualism and the rejection of dependency needs, which was at times apparent in some of the interviews (Participant E and F for example), brought to mind the Thatcher ideology of the 1980's, a time when some were growing up.

Changes in child care practices, specifically the pressure on both parents to work, were a backdrop to interviews. One head teacher (participant C) spoke of his mother (also a teacher) returning to work following his birth. He recalled that this, in the 1950's, was unusual, remembering that she was one of the first women teachers to return to work after having a child in the area in which he lived. This perhaps was an indication of a later drive to support women back into work and teaching was one of the major points of delivery of this governmental policy. Interestingly, female participants in the study recognised that one of the potential sacrifices they made in their choice of career and role was to their own children, even if not yet born.

*‘And that is another challenge as a Head, kids and what I do about that, not what I do about it that sounds harsh, to my unborn children, but yeah how I manage that and what I decide to do, it’s all still to come.’ Participant D.*

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This was a prominent issue for all woman participants, which powerfully links with concepts of ‘Emotional Labour’.<sup>5</sup> The pressure to be a ‘super head’ and a ‘super parent’ created considerable tensions for some.

### **Changes in the Nature of School**

Peter, who recounted his mother’s return to work in the 1950’s would later, in the same interview, provide a growing list of activities and services that he was increasingly expected to provide from his school; after-schools clubs, healthy meals, obesity programs, sexual health programs etc. This extension, echoed in other interviews, appeared to represent a kind of domino effect going back over many years, with parental responsibility increasingly displaced and shunted into schools. Parents have been increasingly forced to work and the institution of the family has been eroded. Consequently, there has been greater dependence on schools to take up the strain. This has forced an evidential shift in the position of schools in the community which, by association, has considerably changed the role of head teacher. Schools have become the proverbial chestnut tree - which has just kept spreading.

Progressively, schools are seen as the centre of the community, a position once the province of the church. Within this displacement they appear to have inherited, amid declining faith in other institutions, moral, social, physical as well as intellectual governance for their congregation. In an individualised society, education remains one of the key avenues for socialisation and cultural transmission, and the propagation bed for later economic success – both individually and nationally. Schools within the reports of participants appeared to have become more pressurised, with tighter

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<sup>5</sup> Sociologist Arlie Horchschild (2003) charts, through interviews with working mothers, the burden of child care and housework still falling predominantly on women who work. This study would suggest that this remains an important and pertinent analysis of working mothers in contemporary society.

systems of control, a shift which is reflective of increasing anxieties about the future for both the individual and society.

The historic institutional containers of societal anxiety are dissolving into flatter structures, anxieties are left scattered and subject to more centralised and generalised attempts at control. Schools appear to be acutely affected by these processes, most notably through the extension of the National Curriculum into ever expanding constituencies of public concern. This expansion demonstrates enormous societal expectations being projected into education, perhaps because of the failure or demise of other institutional containers. In some of the narratives, this made it harder to link the role of head teacher with the task of Education.

Within the narratives of participants the expansion of role was a consistent backdrop, although it was only older head teachers that really appeared to notice or comment on the extension:

*'The only thing that was delegated to you as a head teacher was really how you ran the school, how you led your staff, how you dealt with the welfare and pastoral side of looking after the children and, at my school £3000 to spend on paper and books a year (laughs). That's an interesting contrast with my last appointment as a Head Teacher, just before I retired, where the budget for my school was about £1.5 million pounds and I was responsible for everything really, absolutely everything. The buildings, the welfare of staff, the appointment of staff, decisions about how many staff there were, decisions about whether the staff should be teachers or teaching assistants, how many points of responsibility. I mean all of this had to be approved by the governing body but you were more or less in charge of everything. So the job changed enormously between 1981 when I was first a head teacher to 2006 when I formally retired, there was a huge change.'* Participant C.

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The stepping stone from school to employment - an environment that in the 1970's Miller (1999) suggests was psychologically similar; with each respective organization representing a macro mother - has in the last thirty years been transformed. However, I suggest they are still psychologically similar environments, although deeply changed. Modernity has, through the tide of individualism and commercialism, flooded educational institutions. Schools, like most organizations, no longer function in the same way.

The independence that modernity requires has supported a new breed of candidate, pushing school leaders to be more independent. These are qualities that are perpetuated by the school system, which in turn distributes culture. An aspect of this is individualism. This fosters competition (the requirement of the market) which, as I have suggested, can also cause stress – the fruits of capitalism perhaps. The drive for success that many of our participants described can now also be understood as presenting an element of the wider organization, the wider global society in the mind as well as a personal fit with the institution.

### **Changes in the Organization-in-the-Mind.**

This study did appear to confirm a shift in the leadership function away from the traditional concept of master teacher to a contemporary model of business manager, which in turn appeared to require, and to have created, a different type of head teacher. Here are two extracts which illustrate this point, the first from participant C looking back to when he first became a head teacher.

*'In those days when I first started I could do all my paper work and administration before the kids arrived in the morning and I would spend my days teaching, working round the school, doing work with staff, supporting staff, working with children. I wouldn't do any administration at all. There wasn't much to do really and I wanted to be very hands on and that was the way I approached the job of being a head teacher then.'* Participant C.

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This is a more contemporary account:

*'Heads often complain there is too much paper work but it is technically running a business and balancing books and budgets and making sure that your clients leave the school with good kind of results and qualifications in the same way that when you deal with a business your clients expect to leave with value for money etc etc'* Participant F.

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The temporal points of entry into the education system were frequently predictive of the style and approach to the role. Differences appeared in varying degrees across all interviews, appearing to suggest, not unsurprisingly from my previous observations, something of a professional paradigm shift. This has created fracture lines. The 'other' was frequently referred to in interviews as being all 'chalk and talk' or just downloading lessons or 'teaching to the test'. Newer Heads appeared to have largely accepted, if not agreed with, the current system and appeared comfortable with the language of inspection, league tables and indicators and arising from this appeared to have a different understanding of their role.

To illustrate this in more depth I will consider two participants in detail, Peter (C) and Clive (F). Using the concept of Organisation-in-the-mind (Armstrong, 2005) I have selected two extracts from their narratives which relate to their childhood and their experience of work. I will demonstrate how this can be understood as a personal recollection and simultaneously provide clues about current organizational experience. I have chosen these two examples specifically because they seemed to distil an emotional sense of the whole interview with the respective participant. Secondly, they both appeared to stand out in the overall flow of the narrative. These were key passages within the BNIM methodology because of this and also because they contained both historical and current perspective. These two accounts were also linked somehow in my mind because they appeared to showing me different sides of the same organizational coin:

*'I would catch the bus on my own, and I did this for the first time when I was 6 I think, from xxxxx to xxxxxx and then cross from one bus station in xxxx to another bus station to catch another bus out to where we lived on the outskirts on xxxxxx. I was doing that at 6 (laughs). When I was Head Teacher class teachers of junior age children, you know 7 or 8 year olds were saying they didn't like children going home on their own, walking a couple of streets. They thought their parents should collect them. I remember saying 'no I think it's OK – if their parents decide they want them to walk home on their own I think it's OK (laughs)'. So it does colour. I think I was a bit neglected probably and in school holiday times, when I was quite young, 7 or 8 or weekends, I would go off with my mates and I could be away all day without there being any concern about me. Now I think it made me very independent but, whether it was such a great idea I don't know (laughs).'* Participant C.

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In this brief extract, participant C reflects back on his own childhood. He considers his experience of parenting and his experience and memory of school, relating it directly back to a specific moment he makes a decision as head teacher. He recognises that his own childhood informs the decision he makes. Then looking back, he evaluates his childhood from what appears a current perspective, *'now I think'*, seeing it both as *'a bit neglected'* and a source of independence, but he is not quite sure whether it was a *'great idea'* or not.

He appeared to be caught between two paradigms; the unstructured and possibly *'neglected'* freedom of his own childhood and an increasingly more structured, risk aware perspective which as a head teacher he finds himself managing. We know that later in his narrative he describes himself as being increasingly in opposition to government educational policy and at the point of extreme stress he finds himself haunted by dreams of a child dying. This, on one level, maybe a fear based on his own early uncontained childhood experience which did not afford him a model for the

increasing responsibility for children in his school, but it may also reveal something of a growing occupational and societal concern and fear about risk which is increasingly placed at the feet of head teachers.

This personal account can also be understood as providing a wider vista beyond the individual, related to societal dilemmas and conflicts about the role of parents, the nature of childhood, and tensions between play and work, freedom and structure for both children and adults. These tensions and dilemmas are placed in schools and educational establishments to manage and struggle with. This participant's struggles therefore can also be seen, not only as a personal description, but as an echo and representation of a wider societal and political struggle and anxiety about childhood, children and their education.

The last lines and summary that he was a bit neglected illustrates a theme throughout his interview about abandonment. This can be understood, not only as his personal experience of childhood neglect, but I think it is relayed in this way because it is related to a sense, which was present throughout his interview, that the changing organizational culture has left him feeling abandoned in both a relational and philosophical sense. He recalls early in his narrative the days when Local Authority Advisors '*really were advisors*' and had a '*strong supporting role*'. What was emotionally conveyed was a deep sense of dislocation, loss and uncertainty about future relevance. Throughout his narrative there is nothing helpful or positive described about the current system and there is no one within his narrative who he can make use of as a container for his anxieties or distress until his final breakdown, when he sees a counsellor.

Overall the organization-in-the-mind is not seen as being helpful. Instead, it is something persecutory to be resisted, fought against and denied. It is depicted as being driven by political agenda, data and technologies rather than concern for staff or children, and it is this image that he interacts with. Some of this perception is formed by his background but it is also formed by his experience of work. His later responses and approach to leadership are predictable:

*'It was highly, highly prescriptive, you know 10 minutes of this, 15 minutes of this and so on. Ridiculously prescriptive, a lot of us said at the time 'this is too prescriptive'. I mean with a very heavy hand from Local Authority advisors who then became almost a kind of , not really, but a kind of a thought police, whose job it was to make sure that, you know, the Government's agenda was being followed with the threat behind it of OFSTED if you didn't do as you were told. I mean, you had that very prescriptive do it like this and then two and a half years later when that didn't work, it was as if teachers were being blamed for doing something that they had been told they had to do and that really got me because you know I would say, but look, and I would resist doing some of the worst things. '* Participant C.

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These individual concerns can be seen as a manifestation of deep seated anxieties that exist in schools in an increasingly unpredictable social and economic field, which are managed through increased prescription. It is one perspective on the changing organization that is a school. Contrast this account with this recollection of participant F.

*'I have a great memory that was brought home to me of when I was a youth club leader. I randomly bumped into someone on the tube at the weekend and I know exactly who he is and his family, I have known them for years and he couldn't quite place me, even though we were in the same class and went to school together and when he remembered me he just went 'I remember who you are, you were the bossy one at youth club and I was messing around and we were playing dead in the playground outside, because I had brought those fire cracker snapper things you drop on the floor, I had a bag of them and threw them and they went bang and we just dropped down dead'. I apparently walked over and went over and said "Stop being so silly, people*



*will think you are dead, get up” - or something like that. And he remembers that really clearly and it has obviously affected him for years. I can’t remember it. That was his memory. My memories are of running the tuck shops, being in control of the money. We went off to Hadrian’s Wall and we did a lot of walking and I remember being the guide of the walk. I was only 14 but I was great at walking and map reading and I kind of lead them all off. You can’t really get lost on Hadrian’s Wall to be fair, we had adult youth workers there, obviously. There is very much a bossy controllness about it all and that still comes out now that I absolutely like it my way and people know better than to kind of cross that if I have made it quite clear how I want it to be. Not always a good quality to be honest, it has its moments, there are times to put your foot down and times to ease off a little bit, I guess. ‘I remember people moaning constantly that they were tired. There was one guy who was quite overweight, Brian, and he just moaned the whole time that his feet were hurting, he had blisters and I remember all that kind of stuff and I was just like powering on at top speed, we’ve got to get to the hostel and all that kind of stuff, just ignoring everyone’s moans. I remember stuff like that.’ Participant F.*

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Something about this made me hesitate: at interview and later when looking at the transcripts. It took me by surprise. The interview had been the shortest of all and the general atmosphere had been direct, almost abrupt, there had been little meandering until this recollection.

Again, we can construe this story purely as a tale of the individual and their experience, and rather interestingly, someone else’s memory of them at school. A no nonsense business minded approach had been a theme of the interview and the participant’s approach to schools leadership. Here we see perhaps the seeds of leadership and authority and a need for control at a young age - which he

recognises and relates explicitly to his current role. The leader in embryo form as it were. Perhaps this was one aspect of what he wanted to convey. The role models that influenced him professionally are also described very much in this vein and he adopts their strategies in his management stance with staff. However, the description also conveyed a loss of memory and loss of connection with the past, a resonance with the participants own experience, who had, following his successful career, moved away from the small mining village in which he had grown up. There was no sense of regret or loss conveyed about this.

This anecdote also formulated something of the situation that existed in the wider fabric of his school. The school provided education for children from many cultural backgrounds, including a high proportion of refugees. The violence of children *'dropping down dead'* perhaps conveyed some of the experiences of the children within the school he currently worked in, and the comment *'obviously had affected him for years,'* recognised perhaps the impact of such traumatic memory.

His own professional path had been as singular as the point to point connection of Hadrian's Wall, and this is perhaps why the image stuck in my mind. Somehow, connecting both his personal qualities, his 'valency' for the role, and the organization in which he now worked. Where, by his own account, little was left to chance. The childhood reflection appeared to convey something of his current management style and the wider system, which appeared to place a premium on a prescriptive, narrowly defined structure within which he saw himself as a business leader. It is a passage that provides considerable subjective understanding of how he would later conceive his current role.

*'When I started here there were very few systems in place in terms of the education that was being delivered and so there wasn't a real consistent approach to what was being taught every year or the choice of books. It was pretty much left down to teachers just to kind of make some of those decisions themselves and as a result it made monitoring very difficult, the*

*tracking of children's work, all those kind of things. So yeah they are kind of examples but there are thousands and thousands of things like that that happen, lots of them are very low level and you know you can walk round and someone's like put a bin in a different place and it is very minor but when you have got 400 people on site you expect the bin to be here and if it is not there it all ends up on the floor and it is stupid things like that that you try and correct and sort out. Not everyone sees it like that.'* Participant F.

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The narratives overall are suggestive of a shift away from a reliance on professional judgment to a reliance on organizational systems. Professional judgment is no longer given primacy in this construct but concedes to assessment, monitoring and inspection. Human interactions and actions were standardised, even to the point of where the bins should be located. It bordered on social engineering.

*'The only thing that is consistent in school, it's not the teachers, it's not the pupils, it's the systems that you put in place and those systems have to run from nursery to year six otherwise you have no direct comparisons and you can't then implement them successfully.'* Participant F.

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Teachers in this system are replaceable. It is not far removed from a model of contracted labour (indeed, he had already replaced the caretaker with a local contracted firm – saving considerable money in the process). The employee in the mind is seen as a hired hand on temporary contract requiring little psychological investment. This allows decisions to be made without being troubled by human or emotional consequences.

*'I will say to them you come for an interview here we expect you to be here at 7.30 in the morning, we expect you to leave no earlier than 5 – 5.30 it is a ridiculous working day, we know that it's gruelling, you are expected to work*

*extra-ordinarily hard and this is what we expect you to teach, and they can decide. I don't expect the teachers to stay here forever, it's an inner city school, there is a high burnout/turnover but unfortunately I can't get rid of them at the moment, they won't go which is quite nice but unfortunately there is going to have to be some sort of moving, you know, there has got to be some moves this year because we are getting too stagnant.'* Participant F.

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There is perhaps another aspect to be gleaned, related to wider organizational management. The drive for 'control' – the 'bossy controllness' – of which he speaks also gives us a glimpse of the organizational animal. It is suggestive of one style of management that is fostered (and seen as successful) in the current educational system: an approach that is remote, individualistic, target driven and almost ruthless in nature. His later comments about headship are again predictable,

*'I walked in and I picked out six members of staff and I said to X and the Governors that if you want this school to go anywhere you need to get rid of these people and they were gone within a term. And the school started to rise because these people were blockers; they were never going to let the school change because it was too much hassle.'* Participant F.

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The concept of (hiring and) firing is presented as an argument for effectively managing change and no doubt gaining efficiency. Although there was an awareness of the human cost, through recognition of staff burning out, this did not seem to impede the model of leadership in his mind. An impersonal mechanistic approach underpinned with a need for control was a theme throughout his narrative and, as such, it represented both the personality trait required for leadership and an organizational dynamic.

What was surprising was that, within this highly prescriptive formulation there was also considerable creativity, risk taking and entrepreneurship, but not, for those in teaching posts, who were, it

seemed, very restricted. But as a leader he appeared to cast restriction aside and manage unfettered in quite an innovative way. The high levels of control exercised did not appear to stifle creativity. In fact, the opposite appeared true, and, clearly this had benefitted the school in many ways.

Paradoxically, the relationship with the local authority was disparaged and not wanted because it was seen as restraining and overly bureaucratic.

The later narrative of participant C, Peter, gives us the sense of the same organization approached from a very different perspective.

*'I thought it de-skilled teachers to say we are going to do it by numbers, this is how you will do it, then the teachers lose their skills and teaching isn't just about delivering lessons that are downloaded from the internet and it's the same lesson regardless of the groups of children you teach. That doesn't work and I was seeing a lot of young teachers coming in who could only work in that way, who would download their lesson plans, because it came from the QCA site it must be alright (laughs) and who were, you know, obsessive about test results and I thought we were undermining teacher's professional skills.'*

**Participant C.**

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These appeared to be opposite polarities in response to the changes in education: Clive completely adopts the wider approach and mirrors this within his own practice, while Peter resists, through the Trade Union structure and his own practice as a head teacher. Linda Hoyle (2004), in her article from 'Sycophant to Saboteur', identifies these two polarities in response to organizational change. What this study may add to these observations is how deeply rooted these positions can be within the valency of employees, and the method and style of leadership that introduces change can also be identified with and adopted or rejected by employees.

I wanted to demonstrate through these detailed accounts how deeply the organization can penetrate into individuals. It was true of all participants. The experiences, belief systems,

preconceptions, aspirations and moral goals that lead people into the work blend with the professional belief systems they found within the profession on entering. These values and family belief patterns found resonance in the organization they came to work in, but for some, the changing principles of education made it difficult to adapt these internal templates. The organization in the mind they joined with and the organization they find as they progressed through their careers were very different.

Motivations to work were firmly connected to the identity of participants', and because of this work culture was quickly assimilated into personal identities. It is hard to tell at what point the organization becomes closely integrated with sense of identity, but what was apparent is that in all participants' their professional and personal identities were very closely connected. Armstrong (2005) comments that there is '*penetration both ways*' between organization and person with, I believe, considerable justification. The power of this dynamic cannot be underestimated – the internal voices of individuals and the multi layered voice of the organization are continually in communication at all levels – each sings to the other.

As a result, the following question was paramount: What takes place when through historical organizational developments an individual's professional identity, deeply rooted in organizational experience, melts away? The answer may explain why changes in education practice and policy are deeply felt and complex to negotiate. Some, (usually older), head teachers interviewed found it hard to adjust the formulation and structure of childhood and school in their minds. Primary school held deep personal as well as professional significance. Changes in organizational practice therefore amounted to, and were experienced as, a threat or an attack on an individual's core values and identity. Consequently, shifts in work practice and organizational philosophy produced internal conflict, raising both anxiety, and defences.

*'Well I had grown up in a philosophy that said actually children learn in lots of different ways and under the Plowden kind of approach, more than half of*

*what children learn is not learnt in lessons, in formal lessons, it's learnt at home, it's learnt out of school, it's learnt from their peers. All of this was really, you know, against that philosophy so if a child was having difficulty learning it was because the teaching was bad or this child needed more teaching, so they needed to come to a breakfast club, or an afterschool lesson, or holiday sessions.....cramming things. And, you know, I strongly disagreed because my view was children need time to play, if you put too much pressure on them it de-motivates them, so I was in conflict, big time (laughs).'* Participant C.

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This external situation is experienced here as an internal schism at the core of identity. As you will recall, this is very much related to this participant's own diverse experience of childhood before and after his failure of 11+ exams. The opening sentence, an echo of the opening sentence of his prologue ('I had grown up in a family of teachers'), demonstrates how fundamental, intrinsic and interwoven professional and personal philosophy can be with an individual's sense of self. An evaluation towards the end of his narrative also highlights a melding of self and philosophy: Peter apparently unknowingly confirms the views of Plowden (1967) in respect of his own lived experience - that family and community are more influential than school.

*'Yeah, so I mean I suppose all of this also reinforces a view that role models in your life are really important and you are big time influenced by how your parents behave and how your friends behave and so on and those things have a much bigger impact on your life than teachers generally do.'* Participant C.

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The conflict and dislocation, which is an increasing tenant of his narrative, describes a fragmenting relationship with work and a colossal disjuncture between an individual and the values and philosophy of the wider organization. Emotionally, it appeared to be experienced as a divorce or

betrayal. It was an individual story powerfully conveying the essence of considerable change in the last thirty years.

### **The Leader in the Mind**

When placed together, these two accounts suggest a fundamental shift in the construct of organization and by extension, in the model of management required. What is represented is the tension between being a head teacher (a leader in education) and being a business manager or a manager of systems. Shifts in education have required some head teachers to take on business skills; for some an easy fit, but for others more problematic.

A management approach is adopted by some because it is felt to be justified and sanctioned in the wider system. Others tried to resist.

*'There was that kind of feeling that teachers were being blamed when they were working extremely hard, I mean to the extent that I would worry, I would go round my school, at 5 o'clock at night and say 'go home' to teachers who would have been there since 7.30 in the morning and they just were so conscientious that they just worked harder and harder and harder and that was very difficult. I tried to resist the worst of it.'* Participant C.

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Peter, participant C, represented a traditional model of leadership in a school. His discourse privileges human growth, development and healthy relationships in the workplace over systems and regulation. It is a model of leadership close to, and within the style of, the *'leader as therapist'* (Western, 2008). The position taken by Clive, participant F, is a management stance representative of an anti dependency culture which permeates the wider social landscape. Attachment and dependency in this model are viewed as weakness (and intelligence and audit privileged). His own rather avoidant attachment style is suited to this approach (an interesting area of possible further



research). This was the leader as controller (Western, 2008). Simon Western suggests this discourse faded because of its potential to alienate workers, demonstrated succinctly in this account:

*'I took a load of books in yesterday because one class hadn't done them. They had a million excuses, I wasn't having any of them, they went back to the class, I want them promptly by the end of term, pissed a few people off but you know, it should have been done four weeks ago.'* Participant F.

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However, as this discourse suggests, it does appear to be a model which continues or is being rediscovered in some schools. Perhaps, and it is an important point, that because this was a joint Headship, the other head teacher managed other aspects of the role; a separation of role between business manager and traditional head teacher, which overall did appear to work for them. I perceived that it was this combination that made it sustainable. It was the other head teacher who ultimately resolved the 'sausage' incident I referred to in the last chapter, in a skilful, placatory and thoughtful manner.

This appeared to be one evolutionary path for leadership in the face of public sector change. I am not sure how it would have worked if the other head teacher had left. However, I cannot see how this approach would be ameliorated in the wider system of schools monitoring, where it also seems to dominate. I am left feeling that this is an important point in the modern organization. If this kind of style of management is adopted, where are the containing aspects in the system? They may have evolved in other areas. Changes in organizational leadership may mean we have to think differently about containment outside of traditional hierarchical forms; one such development is coaching and consultancy (Clive did, after all, have a coach).

There was another Leadership approach apparent through participants' discourses. This was the third group (Participants B, D, and E). Participant D for instance, the fast track head teacher appeared to be another type, welding a social conscience with a business and entrepreneurial mind. She enjoyed the expanding remit and the 'power' the role gave her – 'the power to do good' –and

she appears to revel in this potential. While aware of the outputs required, she retains a heavy emphasis on other values and obligations of the role.

*'And with staff, you know you are the boss and I feel that being a Head of a school as opposed to being a boss or a leader in business is different because there is that social and moral responsibility that goes with it.'* Participant D.

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It is a stance that is suggestive again of a significant shift and widening in the role. However, the management approach adopted is different to those previously mentioned in response to organizational changes, in description it is more akin to eco leadership (Western, 2008): a model of leadership that takes a more systemic and ecological perspective recognizing interdependence and connectivity in wider relationships. Overall, it is a more socially aware perspective than the controller discourse and fitted well with the individual approaches of each of these three participants', each of whom embraced the changing nature and expectations of the profession.

*'I think that Every Child Matters and Extended Schools is wonderful because I think it is absolutely right that that's where more and more things should be delivered and because we do know the children and families we have all those ways in and they are legally obliged to come here, bottom line (laughs). So you have kind of got them and you know what I was saying about impact, you know wanting to make an intervention or do something that actually breaks cycles and changes things and gives opportunity and moves things forward for children and their families, potentially their families, then we are the place to do it and that is a privilege. It is how you are smart about that and you bunny hop things on to each other and how you get parents involved. You hook them in with one thing and then get them on to something else and all of that.'* Participant D.

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There is a certain amount of manic omnipotence in this passage; she appears momentarily to get slightly carried away with the 'Every Child Matters' and 'Extended Schools' agendas. She is very identified with these values, perhaps a reflection of the state of mind of those given opportunities in the positive phase of expansion in the public services. She is one example of the '*bright young things*' brought into the profession by changes in policy, the increased wages and the avenue for aspirations provided by the fast track system. The managing style that underpins this enthusiasm is notably aimed at parents – interestingly, the targets and recipients of these improving activities she describes.

Both this participant and participant B, had backgrounds that matched the development and extension of the role. The organization in their minds was extended beyond the limits of the school and this relates well with some of their personal values and experiences, which are evoked by their current leadership practice. Tuning in to wider changes in society and educational services, they were a good fit for changing institutional requirements. Participant B, Jane, with a broader occupational background than most, opted on her return to education to specialise in special needs. Later, her quick rise to headship appeared a result, not just of her aspirations, but also an ability to connect (almost unconsciously it seemed) with the expanding remits of schools. Her capacity to network with other professional groups and her chosen area of specialism had great capital in a changing and increasingly more 'inclusive' and diverse school environment.

This capacity to network, to draw down resources from the external environment, appeared a key factor in explaining why these three generally appeared to manage the increasing portfolio of schools management well. They considered their role in a broader sense, widening the parameters of the organization they held in their minds, which afforded them an understanding of other schools and other services and how these may be used effectively and strategically in the delivery of an expanding service.

## A Wider Perspective

One of the key backdrops to interviews was the changing relationship with the Local Authority and Government. The relationship with the Local Authority was described by one participant prior to the Education Act:

*'Local Authority advisors ... really were advisors, they certainly didn't have a strong monitoring role and they had a strong advisory role so they would come and encourage you and support you really. I never felt that the Local Authority advisor was going to give me a hard time, they were supportive and helpful.'* Participant C.

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This supportive relationship had largely evaporated in later accounts, being replaced by something far more suspicious, distrusting and altogether persecutory – *'the thought police'* being one such description. David Blunkett's assertion that he would put *'teachers' under unrelenting pressure'*, as I have commented previously, was remembered by one (participant C) as the moment he realised that the relationship with national and local government was going to be very different.

The longest serving head appeared to mourn this loss and change, whilst newer heads did not appear to recognise its passing and indeed some wanted far less involvement with the Local Authority, which was not perceived or described in any narratives as a positive source of support.

*'When the history books of the future are written about education this time will be talked about as the reign of terror in education'.. You will do this and if you don't do it you will be punished. And since I have left teaching it's even worse you know, now because the performance management is so much now, your pay is linked to your results, you know as crude as that. Not anything else you do, if your results are bad you don't deserve to get a pay rise, never mind the children you teach, Now that is worse, significantly worse than the*

*payments by results of Victorian times because it wasn't done on an individual basis then'. Participant C.*

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The removal of what has been termed a dependency culture (Miller, 1993) and the shift to a more self sufficient and individualistic society has produced a very different climate in which schools function. Targets have informed organizational design, which has distracted from core aspects of the work, and deeply effect the way the work is now undertaken and structured.

The 'market' in which schools increasingly operate, and the concept of consumer choice, has dictated organizational culture. Commercial values have penetrated deeply into public service and education as they have into childhood. It makes it hard to acknowledge vulnerability or to request support from the Local Authority and harder still to approach other head teachers. The 'market' that many perceived as their wider organisation meant that many head teachers felt they were in competition with each other, which forced them back on themselves for support, because as I have stated previously, this was not felt or afforded to be provided by the current system.

*'I have been there when people have been quite delighted when a school have not had a very good OFSTED report and the looks and the smiles and the.....and I just think for god's sake we are all in the profession together- it really does come down to that!' Participant E.*

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This represents primitive responses triumphing over the depressive position, the market driving a wedge between schools and preventing collective action. The comments above indicative of a paranoid state of mind linked to the collective mobilisation of basic assumption fight/flight (Bion, 1968). No wonder some could not approach peers for support. However, clearly others were more able to do this – and with some useful effect.

Paul Hoggett (2000) makes the point that welfare reform is driven by an overwhelming need for fitness for labour, rather than social justice or collective wellbeing. It is particularly apparent in this

occupational field. The organization-in-the-mind of some participants appeared to suggest that the social system within the organization would just take care of its self.

Political need for an adaptable and flexible workforce may be behind the introduction of a National Curriculum. Examination, tests, Leagues tables, and OFTED reports, performance targets and special measures provide quality control for both teachers' and children. Teaching appears to be a profession completely overrun by assessment and systems of control. The production process appeared standardised and homogenous, leaving teaching skill a denigrated second, the system, and not professional judgment increasingly takes precedence. Learning was rarely mentioned in narratives. Development was the word that was superimposed, a subtle and interesting shift in focus, which fitted with the wider business paradigm of measurement, and improvement; with progress the desired outcome fostered by targets. These appeared to be the new exemplars of the educational service for children and for staff.

A sense of failed dependency (Miller, 1993) breeds distrust in and between professionals. An underlying distrust exists in schools as to whether teachers can be trusted with the longer term learning of students. This is perhaps behind the increasing regulation that government delivers on society's behalf. The focus shifts to outputs (rather than learning or the love of learning), increasing conflict and anxiety in the system which also creates individualised attitudes amongst staff (who are individually assessed). The sense of a collective organization outside the school is largely (but not wholly in some of the narratives) swept away.

I am not suggesting that all participants thought about their schools in this way. What I am suggesting ,however, is that this is representative of a particular kind of dynamic in the school system, which head teachers are managing, whatever their strategies for doing so. The overall sense of failed dependency in society has led to more regulatory measures being put in place and schools have been part of, and subject too, this process.

As I have suggested, Education functions as a relatively closed organizational system. As a consequence it has been difficult to change practice and get new ideas in. Successive governments

have used considerable pressure (more stick than carrot) to combat systemic gravity towards homeostasis. It has been hard to teach teachers. The closed system culture perpetuates but with slightly paradoxically increasing parameters, as more responsibilities are forced across the boundary without, in some cases, the necessary internal adaptation. However, overall the narratives demonstrated a process of deskilling and re-skilling active and at work within the profession.

Faced with the task of educating small children, even before increasing responsibilities were delegated into schools, there was considerable pressure to create a family environment. This while offering some benefits, also lends itself to a distortion of the primary task (Miller and Rice, 1967) which again is reinforced and proliferated by a closed system dynamic. The phenomenal primary task – the task they are engaged in but not consciously aware - (Miller 1993) could in some accounts be seen as providing a family environment, a nice dynamic but also potentially deeply problematic if unrecognized as we have considered in previous chapters. Others were engaged in a very different phenomenal task: organizational success through meeting targets. Again there were benefits, and potential hazards, if unrecognized.

There would appear to be few 'attractors' (Lewin, 1947) for change in primary schools other than the rather crude behavioural mechanisms of control alongside market forces that have been increasingly used to produce it. Not surprisingly, this has created distortions. One of which, and possibly the most extreme, is cheating. Five primary schools were investigated for cheating last year. Schwartz (1994) describes this as the 'Lake Wobegon Effect' where all children are 'above average'. He then describes the impact of league tables in one district - where 83% of all elementary schools were above average – maintained, he suggests, through some rather dubious practices (teaching to the test and cheating to name but two). Schwartz concludes that it makes the problem of education 'worse' not better.

However these strategies have become increasingly adopted by the Educational system which has to provide 'unreality' because 'reality' is not wanted, the technology and reporting systems

surrounding schools forces people to be dishonest or fail. The truth is avoided because only 'good news' is wanted as the output, expressing another view was felt to be unacceptable.

*'You could be publicly put down by an advisor in a meeting with your colleagues and so head teachers' got very kind of reticent to make any professional criticism.'* Participant C.

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However, good news is only good news if it can be related to bad news in some way (Lousada and Cooper, 2005). In schools, the only place to put bad news is 'special measures'. The task for schools, at an unconscious level, as Obholzer (1994) suggests is daunting,

*'At an unconscious level, what is hoped for from the education system is unreality: that all our children will be well equipped – ideally, equally equipped to meet all of life's challenges.'* (Obholzer, 1994:172).

Truth appeared to be largely avoided, in an organizational sense. Many spoke openly about this. The technology pushed people into circumstances they knew were unreal. It was a burden for some.

*'But they would look for a 5% improvement between one cohort and the next and I would say to them "but that doesn't have any significance at all, that's one child we are talking about here" (laughs) one child can make 5% difference to the schools or more and I even directed them towards research that's been done on this because there is an educational statistician called Carol Fitzgibbon and she's often said the school that's at the bottom of the league could in fact be at the top and vice versa. It's just meaningless, these comparisons. But there is this huge industry now that's built around a belief that all of this data crunching is important and that it can tell you something. If it can, if it is significant I would be the first to accept it but I am not prepared to accept, you know it's like, smoke and mirrors, it's witchdoctory.'*



*Really, I mean it's just mumbo jumbo and what's alarming is that so much is invested in the belief that this business has got some validity when I don't think it has.'* Participant C.

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This account was one of many which expressed, a perception that all of those interviewed shared – even if they were benefitting from good results at the time of interview. Truth and authenticity appeared to be the required sacrifice for the appeasement of authority figures, the superintendants of the inspectorial order increasingly placed in schools.

The perception of the organization participants held in their minds was influential in the style of management adopted. Some were left at sea unsure or not wanting to make the transition from one organizational culture to another. I think this is a key point: change has to be understood on a number of different levels in schools (and in any organization). For some head teachers' it was not only changing organizational practice, not only increased inspection and auditing, and not only the increasing responsibilities of schools. It fundamentally shifted some of the philosophies they held about teaching and, perhaps more painfully, about themselves.

In a changing external environment, we can see that political, social, and technological changes require a continual level of 'internal' restructuring. The capacity to reconfigure the narrative of one's life would appear to be a key component of negotiating change, being able to re-evaluate, reassess taking into account losses, regrets, and changing perspectives as they arise. However this was not a process in any way supported or understood within the organizational system in which it was described. Not surprisingly it created difficulties for individual and organization alike.

## Chapter 15

### **Extending the Conceptual Framework - The Organization-in-the-Mind Revisited.**

It has become apparent that the professional approach of all participants' to leadership was influenced by their early childhood experience, their early educational experience, their family and community contexts, their early careers (and the careers they did not choose) and the support, role models and mentoring they received on their rise up the schools hierarchy to headship. But this is not the only story. What became increasingly clear is that these individual narratives – both personal and professional – were powerfully acted upon by wider dynamic forces. What has been in evidence is the degree that individual trajectories and life histories have been continually intersected by the changing social, political and professional forces they have passed through. These all represent important 'force fields' (Lewin, 1947) which have shaped the lives and approaches of all participants'.

The key question in BNIM, why did someone who lived there life like this tells their story like that, I think in this study the answer is (and there may well be others): because it tells us something of who they are and where they organizationally stand now.

The recounted story of individuals appeared to suggest that they were describing not just a biographical arc depositing them in their current circumstances - the sum of their lifetime experiences and the various domains (Brunning, 2006) they have passed through. Through describing their lifetime trajectories and recalling aspects of their lives, both professional and personal it became apparent they were simultaneously and unconsciously describing their contemporary circumstances via personal anecdotes and recounted memory. This had the quality of a personal metaphor for their current organizational position.

The current organizational context (COC) is a key source of gravity in the framing of individual experience within an organization. It is this current frame that will, I believe, illicit and evoke

particular features of an individual's historical experience. This current organizational constellation calls forth particular sets or clusters of experience which are felt to be relevant and symbolic of current organizational perspectives. I am not suggesting a linear pattern of chronological understanding, neither a model of psychoanalytical biography - although both have value – rather a multi dimensional model that places precedence on contemporary positioning – the point where all other experiences are viewed from – in the selection of biographical data. It is from this point that we conduct and express something of our present experience through the emotional resonances created through the accounts of our historical lives.

In this way, individuals can project into their historical selves' aspects of their current experience – which of course may also be linked to these earlier events. However, this is not the only reason for selection. The current organizational state is so deeply imbued within an individual's current being that it functions like a search engine filtering and retrieving experiences that are relevant to current status. An earlier experience is called forth, raised because it is both connected to and triggered by current circumstances but also because, more precisely, it illuminates and casts a light on these circumstances. It is a two way process – the layers of experience create and inform current perspective however within the selection of recounted experience the current organizational emotional positioning is also pinpointed.

It is this current organizational, role which is essentially privileged where the individual, exposed to and saturated by, the multiple projections of the organization expresses not only themselves but something of the institution.

It is here that the domain model (Brunning, 2006) becomes problematic because no primacy is granted to any specific domain: all could be seen of equal relevance and standing. This, in my view, is not the case. Each and every one of these fields is flooded by current organizational experience. This, the current constellation of experience, pulls all other domains with tremendous gravity, activating resonances and experiences from these fields when relevance to current status is

acquired - even, and it is an important point, and particularly when there is no rational connection to be seen.

Our historical lives and the associated emotional experiences, both conscious and (largely) unconscious, underpin our current emotional states but they are also resurrected by them in response to pressures (and projections) in the here and now, both personal, organizational and systemic. The uncovering of individual truth through analytical understanding may deny organizational and contemporary positioning which is being simultaneously expressed through recounted memory. The archaeology of an individual's historical experience needs to be understood in a current context as well as an individual and societal chronology in which it is imbedded.

I am describing a dynamic event: moving backwards and forwards from varied perspectives but bringing them back essentially to the moment of the telling: the moment that, through the act of remembering, has pulled historical knowledge forward to supplement current internal understanding.

In the 'History Boys' (Bennett, 2006) Rudge, an apparently, (but actually not a) dull witted student, when forced to define history comments that *"History is just one fucking thing after another."* Experience is ultimately the same but the ordering in our minds is not. It is pulled by far stronger forces than chronologies. Largely unconscious, our current circumstances twist, bend and contort our previous experiences into patterns which then sculpt and depict our current personal and organizational topography. If we can perceive this as consultants, and help our clients to do likewise, a vast landscape becomes available for thought all of which can be brought to bear on the present moment and the current context.

Others have been here before, such as Armstrong (2005) and Stokes (1994). I do not feel the implications or indeed the genesis of their ideas – the organization-in-the-mind - is as well understood as it should be in the consultancy field. Generally what is conveyed, in my experience, is more the original exposition defined from Organisational Role Analysis (Hutton, Bazalgette, & Reed, 1997). Armstrong acknowledges he was, in his initial publications, *'only scratching the surface'*

(2005:53) and yet oddly – although he would be a hard act to follow - no one seems to have taken a chisel to develop the ideas further. Somehow we were '*teased out*' (2005:54) of further thought or moved on, looking for something new. I strongly believe this is an area that warrants further research.

The 'music' of the organization in the mind is played in the moment through the orchestra of our internal lives whether we perceive it or not – largely not, I suggest. It is a considerable emotional repertoire which has considerable impact on how individuals and organizations function. We conduct it both consciously and, I suspect, more frequently unconsciously through our selection.

Bollas (2007) was driving at this, in a different but connected way. He uses the image of the symphonic score for understanding the articulation of the unconscious through, an internal or unconscious logic of sequence. This needs to be understood not through the unearthing of hitherto hidden incidence or experience – although of course this is relevant - but through the interaction of the whole. It is the interplay between all aspects, and the primacy of the current moment, in the interviews and by extension consultancy sessions, that provide a sense of the depths of organization that is held in the mind and how it is being conveyed through the individual. In this sense personal recollection is played through an organizational prism.

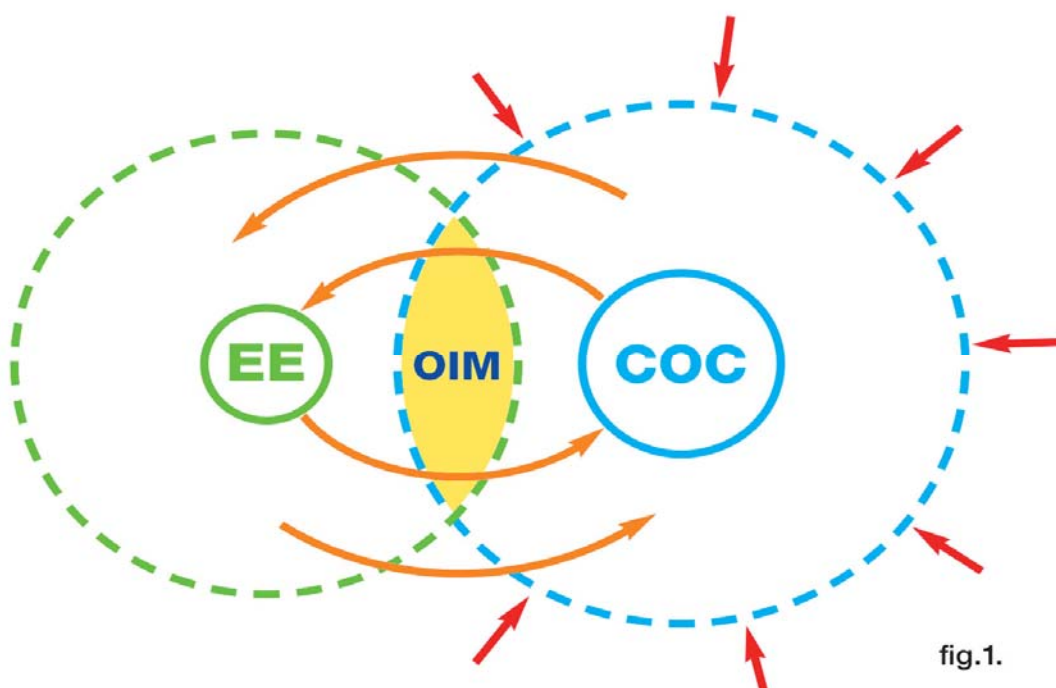
In this study, the value of this approach is demonstrated through the thematic theme analysis which through the 'structure' and logic of the telling opens a new dimension of understanding in each of the interviews. Its extension to consultancy would be invaluable.

In the last chapter, I gave two detailed examples of how recounted incidence provoked a sense of current circumstances. These appeared not to be expressed consciously or to be articulated as a known aspect of experience. Rather the 'unthought known' (Bollas 1994), chronicled through the unconscious selection and presentation of material from an internal catalogue of data. These were not the only examples – there were many others – but they were accompanied with a sense in me that something else was being conveyed simultaneously. This, unconscious influence is far more

influential and significant in shaping the organization-in-the-mind partly because it functions below consciousness and therefore is not available for assimilation via reflection and thought.

In relation to consultancy, everything that is recounted needs to be understood not just as a linear patterning and layering of experience but as a multi dimensional prism powerfully connected to present standing and positioning. There is no sense of time in the unconscious and selection of experience, is far from neutral. Everything that occurs in the parameters of the consultancy meeting, everything the client brings the opening and closing moments, the recounted memories, the telling of the story, and all the irrelevant details, are all relevant by their admission, and all when placed together convey something of the organization-in-the-mind.

The diagram below (fig. 1) depicts how the current organizational context (COC) calls forth earlier experiences (EE) which have recursive – both conscious and unconscious - effect on the forming of the organization-in-the-mind. Earlier experience is used, in this example, to convey any earlier experience and could be related to any domain i.e. early childhood, early education, late childhood, early professional experience etc. The red arrows indicate the external pressures on current context. The perforated circles indicate the parameters of the unthought known linked to the known – the inner circle - conscious and acknowledged aspects of experience both personal and organizational. The point of convergence forms the organization-in-the-mind (OIM).



The second diagram (fig.2) shows how elements of the organization-in-the-mind (OIM) can then inform performance in role (PIR), with both known and 'unthought known' aspects impacting on professional functioning which simultaneously confirm - through performance - the organization held in the mind. It is in essence a circular process; one confirms and reinforces the other.

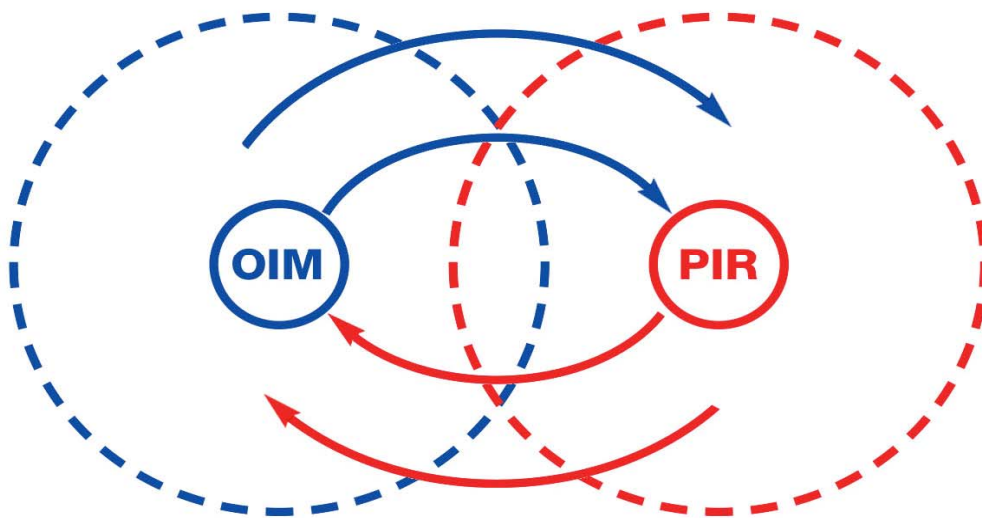


fig.2.

The final diagram (fig.3) shows the overall model: with the organization-in-the-mind at the core of role performance and the proposed target for consultancy intervention.

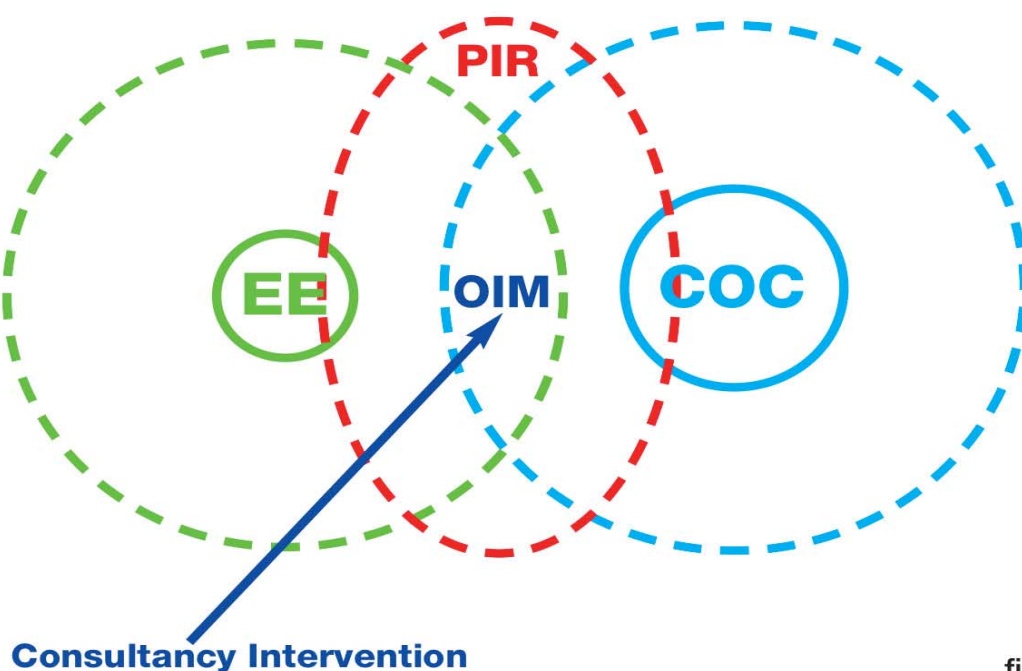


fig.3.

In a two way circular process the current contemporary context calls forth previous experience, which reinforces features of the organization held in the mind which in turn shapes and informs functioning in role.

I am not proposing that there is no other meaning available, nor denying that there is personal facets to participants' stories, which obviously there are. What I am trying to suggest is that there is another layer of experience – the current work context - which generates the selection of personal material because it is felt to be relevant to current perspectives.

Individual struggles can also be understood as organizational struggles and further meaning and understanding can be found - beyond personal pathology - in the interweaving of self and organizational role. The work role of individuals interviewed appeared to co create their narratives, revealing a hidden dimension which evoked earlier resonances from their inner worlds. It demonstrated how deeply immersed we are in the group and how deeply the organization of work resonates within us. The concept of the organization-in-the-mind offers a depth model of understanding which can chart these territories for both individual and organization alike. Through adjusting our gaze or listening with the 'third ear' (Stokes quoted in Armstrong, 2005) we can start to fathom a deeper understanding of the individual in the group, and in the work place.



## Chapter 16

### Recommendations for Schools

There is a need for fundamental change in the systems of support and development that schools currently offer staff particularly those who are struggling or experiencing stress. However, support to staff is not the only objective of these recommendations which are also aimed at improving organizational effectiveness and efficiency. I consider these to be continually undermined by a lack of capacity to address or consider deeper human functioning in any organization. I do not feel the high incidence of stress that is evident through previous research and highlighted within this study, can be addressed within the current system unless there is an understanding that, in some part, the cause (and therefore the remedy) lies beyond the individual.

Later thoughts and recommendations are based on a number of assumptions drawn from my research;

- 1) The organization of work is not something alien to or outside of the individual. It may be experienced this way but systems of work are created, maintained and perpetuated by individuals who work within them. Therefore reducing stress has to be connected to both the individual and more critically linked to organizational functioning.
- 2) Stress is not predictable – despite earlier studies – it goes beyond a mechanistic or engineering model of understanding. Stress results from the way the work and the organization is perceived by the individual and the team which in turn influences performance in role. Many factors contribute to this perception.
- 3) Individual distress needs to be understood as representing something of the individual themselves **but** also something of their current organizational context and role. A more

systemic approach can consider processes of displacement and how these can be owned, modified and relocated within, and more appropriately, in the organization.

- 4) Education is inherently stressful. Staff need to be resilient and self aware to live with a high level of anxiety and stress in the workplace. Structures that have evolved within schools are not always sufficient to support staff in managing or containing these feelings and indeed in some instances (whether by design or not) are designed to suppress or disguise anxiety.
- 5) Education is part of a wider society in which there is increasing anxiety about the future and because of this a demand on schools for better results and increasing pressures to provide an adaptable and highly skilled workforce.
- 6) Concerns about future survival as well as moral and ethical dilemmas are placed in schools to resolve. These concerns and their associated anxieties contribute to individual and organizational stress and contribute to an increased need for control.
- 7) While society's expectations impinge and weigh heavily on schools we are all in some way involved in placing pressures on schools.

#### **Further thoughts and possible Recommendations:**

- 1) Selection and Recruitment of (teachers) and head teachers:** This should in some part focus on the motivations for working with children in a school. This would support a more robust program of selection – where later vulnerabilities can be identified at an early stage – and provide an initial platform to support staff in thinking and considering their deeper motivations for role and task. This could resemble a process of selection set out by Warner (1992) in respect of Residential Children Homes.
- 2) Systems of supervision and support:** Need to be considered on three levels: 1) Teaching and support staff: An ongoing and regular system of supervision should be initiated in all

schools for all staff. This should be provided by the senior management team who, in turn, should be provided with training in this area. 2) head teachers' to have access to consultancy or coaching or a system of external support which is separate from any inspection or monitoring process. The task would be to develop leadership skill and capacity through an understanding of individual, group and systemic processes (including unconscious processes) in teams. 3) A system and model of peer supervision (initially with external consultancy) to be provided in local groups of between 4-8 Head Teachers.

**3) Training for Headship:** As part of the training already provided for head teachers' (NPQH,) a structure of placements in external organizational settings should be developed. Alongside this some thought and stimulus should be given to link head teachers' with local business leaders and networks which could provide significant benefit – I suspect - to both. This would counteract some of the effects of insular professional experience, closed system dynamics and the associated difficulties identified.

**4) Considerations for Consultancy:** Counseling and psychotherapy, in my experience, are frequently proposed in relation to stress at work. While I feel this may in many respects be helpful and for some people this will be the most appropriate intervention there is, I feel a danger that this maintains a focus on the individual, and not the organization. Because of this, while recognizing psychotherapy as a bona fide intervention where there are issues arising from individual psychopathology, I would suggest that systems psychodynamic consultancy would be of benefit in providing an individual and organizational understanding linked to some of the issues within this study. Where this is the required approach I would further suggest that a model of role analysis supported by the theory of 'organization in the mind' (Armstrong, 2005) be adopted.

## Chapter 17

### Conclusion

These have been individual stories travelling through time. Different times perhaps, but with some commonalities. The story from childhood to headship and, in some cases, to breakdown revealed something of what Christopher Bollas (1991) describes as the forces of destiny at work from early childhood. This study demonstrated the interplay between personal motivation, drive and valency for task and the underlying and changing psychological contract required for the role in a changing organization within a changing society.

Structural changes have increased head teachers' responsibilities, they are held to account through testing, league tables and published results, all forms of measurement which have been designed to increase competition between schools and to improve their 'efficiency', while denying the potential 'inefficiency' the inequalities and limitations of clients - or to put it another way, the realities of the work.

These were structures and systems which, it appeared, were largely accepted and unquestioned by newer head teachers'. This study has identified some head teachers who appeared to be exemplars of a new form of headship. These were self sufficient, business-minded, entrepreneurial, risk takers who were able to take up their authority in innovative and creative ways. This appeared, in the terms of Bion's (1968) theory of basic assumption groups, as the penetration of the 'fight-flight' of the market into education in place of the 'dependency' mode of earlier years, representing something of a psychological shift in the nature of the work and the underlying requirements for the role of head teacher.

These biographical accounts suggest an underlying anxiety is powerfully present in contemporary schools, which is experienced by children, by parent, and by all school staff, head teachers included. This anxiety arises from deep-rooted fears about future life-chances and survival, in a competitive and precarious social environment. This is especially the case as individual life chances

have come to depend so much on childrens' performance within the educational system. These anxieties generate a continued '*need to do better*', a mantra which appears to dominate discourse in schools, and indeed, the earliest childhood memories and narratives of a number of the participants. Crumbling historical institutions appear to have left schools and head teachers' picking up increasing responsibility for children who have fallen through gaps in the wider societal fabric. In this way, head teachers' are left shouldering concerns and anxieties on behalf of the wider community and professional network.

Schools have been colonised by a whole series of functions which were previously assigned to other institutions including families. Concerns, (for example about a decline in social bondedness) raised in political discourse and in the media appear to become rapidly designated as problems which schools are expected to solve. This apparent delegation of responsibility for broad social ills enables the wider society to feel absolved of responsibility, and leaves schools and head teachers' 'holding the baby' (sometimes almost literally) on behalf of all of us. While some appeared to revel at this prospect, others in the interviews appeared weighed down and overburdened. The failing school in this structure is no longer seen as a product of the whole system, but instead merely as an individually flawed and dysfunctional unit requiring special attention, 'special measures', or even closure.

Irene Hogg was a head teacher who went missing two years ago, and was later found dead, having killed herself less than a week after a visit from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education. Her brother commented, following her death that: *'There was nothing flaky or fragile about her. But she was overwhelmed with the growing amount of administrative work she had to do. She was a teaching Head, but found it virtually impossible to fulfil both roles. For her, the children always came first and when she felt that wasn't the case, she was unhappy.'* (Sunday Times 25/03/2007) Her trade union quoted in the same article commented that; *'you never quite know the individual circumstances'*.

Of course they were right, on one level: that they did not know. The question is what is it that prevents us knowing? Sadly this is not the only example of suicide in primary schools: In 2007 two

primary school teachers committed suicide as '*a result of OFSTED induced stress*' One, Keith Waller, a teacher, felt '*bullied and victimised*' following a poor Ofsted report. His head teacher had judged his lessons to be between '*satisfactory and inadequate*,' No doubt she was responding to similar pressures.

This is the system of education at work and the individual consequences lay bare. Again I am not denying there is a personal element to these stories. But in the rush to avoid blame, and in attempts to avoid pain and anxiety, we conscribe the answers to the individual, no more questions asked, and no answer expected. The wider organizational truth is also buried.

Some head teachers' in this study tried to mitigate pressures from the wider system by absorbing the burden themselves, in some cases with devastating results. Others simply passed it on in the same organizational style in which it was delivered to them; they had after all become accustomed to this management model throughout their careers. I suspect this resulted in considerable stress for those they managed where burnout was expected, necessary collateral damage in achieving the required results. Others again adapted in a different way, combining a broad understanding of the role with a networking and emotionally aware style of leadership, which appeared to provide benefits for staff and children alike, not all of which could be measured by league tables.

When viewed together, the narratives of participants' provide insight into processes of change within the profession spanning over thirty years. They describe a transition from 'Master Teacher' to that of 'Business or Systems Manager', but this study has also revealed some positions in between these polarities. This study also highlights the adaptations that it has necessitated for individuals. Their reported experience reveals a complex series of interrelations, between their personal qualities, family history and the context of their early lives, their educational and professional experiences, as well as their role and position within their current organization. And alongside all of this is a social and political dimension, the backdrop to their narratives, the forces which have inhabited the landscapes they have lived through, and which has in turn forged their experiences and the organizations they have come to live their lives in.

The research demonstrates how internal templates or scripts have to be continually renegotiated within periods of organizational change, such as the present. What I came to see is that both transitions and stress can only be managed well if there is a space to think about what is happening and the potential implications for the individual and the system. The narratives reinforced this perception. Whether this reflective space was provided by close and trusted colleagues, consultants, partners, Doctors or retreats in Spain, the need for a reflective space was demonstrable. Without it (and some received it too late to save their careers) there is a risk of human damage, and not just to the role holder.

Head teachers are an example of one of several professions within the education and welfare system which have been placed under considerable stress by the changes in structure and culture in which they are embedded. There is evidence that these changes have provided creative opportunities for some, but they have also created risks for many others. One of these risks is to the psychological health of the role holder, and by association the overall health of the organization. A focus solely on technology, assessment and inspection ultimately runs the risk of ignoring the fact that human well-being is fundamental to the health of any organization, and to any society.

Apparent across all interviews was the impact of emotions and experiences which were frequently unconscious – all of the participants recalled at interview something of their experience they had previously forgotten.

Memories of the scallop shell and those early thoughts on Aldeborough beach come back to me now at the end. *'I hear the voices that cannot be drowned'*. The first entry in my diary has perhaps taken on a deeper significance. Internal 'voices' appeared to have powerful impact on current professional experience and decision making for many participants. Unacknowledged they lingered on, hidden just under the surface of awareness, not quite banished – evoked by the work – they created disturbance for individual and organization alike but simultaneously provided an opportunity for understanding. The listener both hears and yet also calls forth those voices which have been

submerged because it has some relevance, and some working on the present - each voice sings to the other.



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## **Research Pack**

### **Introduction**

The program of research I am undertaking will represent my final research project and thesis for the Doctorate in Consultation to Organisations. This document will give some background information related to myself, the course I am undertaking, the research and methodology and, finally, issues related to permission and confidentiality.

The professional field of education is essentially new to me. I am not a teacher. My involvement has largely been through the consultancy services I have provided to schools, through consultancy to groups of teachers or role consultancy to Head Teachers. It has been these experiences and the professional experiences of those I consult to that has made me identify this as an area of research that is much needed, and, I hope, of importance and value in the field of consultancy and public sector management.

### **Personal Background**

I am an experienced Consultant and Social Work Manager. I trained as a Consultant to Organisations at the Tavistock Centre in London five years ago. It is here that I am currently studying the Doctorate Programme in Consultation to Organisations.

I am a qualified Social Worker and my professional background has largely been within Social Work and includes experience of management in a variety of Services within a large local Authority.

As a consultant I have worked in the private, public and not for profit sectors. My current role as Team Manager of a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team, a service which provides mental health services to children in schools, engages me in providing consultancy to groups of teachers and Head Teachers.

### **The Course**

The professional Doctorate in Consultation to the Organisation is run by the Tavistock Clinic and the University of East London. The course is designed to equip organisational consultants to meet the complex needs of organisations in the private and public sectors and seeks to develop a culture of applicable research led by professional practice which will increase the theoretical base of the profession.

The course and qualification maintains a rigorous research focus, as well as taught components of material and skills relevant to the profession. All research proposals have to be agreed by the Assessment Board of the Tavistock Clinic and University of

East London prior to there initiation. This proposal was agreed at first presentation in January 2008.

## **Research Title**

***An investigation of the stresses, pressures and challenges faced by Primary School Head Teachers in a context of organizational change in Schools.***

## **Research Methodology**

The model of research I will use will be based on a Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method. It is a model which explores peoples lived experiences through biographic narrative interviews. In essence, this methodology uses a three stage approach to interviewing with initially open and then more targeted questions.

Interviews are taped and then transcribed with participant's identity anonymised (see confidentiality). The process of interview will take approximately two hours, with breaks. This should represent the overall time commitment required, however, following transcription I may need to contact participants for some further clarification on any points raised. This would normally take the form of a brief pre arranged telephone interview.

Occasionally, this open interview method may bring up issues or feelings that maybe unexpected, therefore at anytime it is fine to stop the interview or have a break. After the research interview you may feel you would like to discuss further, in these circumstances I would be prepared to offer two consultancy sessions (for no fee). These would not form part of the research and would represent organisational role consultancy and, therefore, would remain separate from the overall program of research.

## **Confidentiality**

Participants in the research will remain anonymous. All details which would allow identification, of the individual or the organisation, will be changed to protect confidentiality. Further to this any information that is stored will be in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

In the event of any further publication a separate permission will be sought from all participants.

## **Right to Withdraw**

It is important that you do not feel under any obligation or pressure to be part of the research and throughout the process of interview, or at any stage after, you have a right to withdraw.

## **Permission**

I will not be seeking any further permission in respect of this research other than from the assessment board and the individual participants who are managers and

leaders in their organisations. If you feel that you require permission from your organisation you would need to have this in place prior to agreement.

### **Acknowledgement**

I hope those people who take part will receive some benefit and insights through the participation in the project. I understand that in busy professional lives giving up time and energy to take part in research is difficult and not easily achieved. I wanted to offer my thanks and gratitude for your time and commitment in offering to take part in the research. It is greatly valued and appreciated.

## **CONFIDENTIAL**

### **Permission and Agreement**

I hereby give my agreement to be a participant in the research programme into the Experiences of Head Teachers as Leaders of Schools being conducted by Simon Tucker as part of his Doctorate Studies being conducted at the Tavistock Clinic and the University of East London.

Name.....

Signature.....



## Appendix B. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA CHRONOLOGY/THEMATIC FIELD ANALYSIS

Biographic Data Chronology	Thematic co-field analysis
<p><b>1948 Sister born</b>  <b>1950 Born into family of teachers</b> (Mother working class background – her parents (A grandparents) both Mill Workers.) Mother good musician. Sing to A. A would sing in his pram – ‘singing came with speech’  Mother one of few woman married teachers – returned to teaching when A was 3.  <b>Strong Baptist upbringing</b></p> <p><b>A would catch bus home by self from school age 6</b>  Holidays off with mates all day/ play meccano/ fix bikes in school holidays ‘bit neglected’</p> <p><b>Age 8 sang in choir (Anglican church)</b></p> <p>Didn’t intend to follow parents ‘very interested in engineering’  Sister (4 yr older) very successful lot of comparisons by parents/teachers</p> <p><b>Sister passes 11+</b>  <b>Failed 11+</b> In XXXX s (high failure rate) That (failure) Coloured my thinking ‘determined to be successful’ failing - big issue for parents</p> <p><b>Age 11 moved to XXXX</b>  <b>Age 12 passes 11+</b>  <b>Age 16 attends 6<sup>th</sup>. Form. Sings in Cathedral Choir had music lessons.</b> Thinks about ‘music college’. Father ‘think about your prospects’</p> <p><b>1968 Attends College of Education.</b></p> <p><b>1970 onwards Taught in a couple of schools</b></p> <p><b>Joined ‘unattached team’ school to school ‘acting deputy’</b>  Active in National Union of Had Teachers</p> <p><b>Age 31 (1981) First Head Teacher post.</b></p> <p><b>1987 Secondment to Local Committee for Education</b></p> <p><b>1988 Education Reform Act</b></p> <p><b>1989 Working in Support Services</b> (in service training) – refuses training to be OFSTED inspector.</p> <p><b>1990 2<sup>nd</sup> Headship</b> (7 years) mining village.</p> <p><b>1991 Proposed to NUT conference should boycott SATS.</b>  From 1992 in conflict (x3) with what being asked to do. Conflict effecting state of mind.</p> <p><b>1997 3<sup>rd</sup> and Final Headship</b> XXXX City (8 years).</p> <p><b>1997 Change of government</b> ‘this is the way you are going to do it’ increase pressure– LA. Plunkett ‘we are going to put teachers under unrelenting pressure to improve standards.’</p> <p><b>2001/02 Recruitment problem in schools</b></p> <p><b>2005 ‘Lighter touch Inspections’ Holiday writing SEF ‘did for me’</b></p> <p><b>2005 Breakdown/Retirement</b></p> <p><b>At end of interview son has recently become a teacher.</b></p>	<p>Report of growing up in family of teachers/ about other possibilities engineering/music – father keen get ‘secure job’ College and philosophy of Ed. Plowdon Report and historical position of teaching – ‘LA Advisors supportive and helpful.’</p> <p>Youngest Head Teacher and active in NUT.</p> <p>Report about historical differences – financial management: when Education managed by LA Heads just managed school - first schools budget £3000 comparison with last school £1.5 Million – ‘changed enormously’ – first headship - no administration duties more teaching.</p> <p>Narrative about period as unattached staff continues narrative to first head ship - Did not aspire to be a Head (x4) ‘did not elect to be a head’</p> <p>Took first headship when previous head had ‘heart attack’</p> <p>Report about early teaching posts Deprived school – ‘highest level of deprivation in the city’ followed by Radical changes 88 Act</p> <p>Report of invitation to apply to XXXs poly Seconded.</p> <p>Report about refusal of OFSTED. And self evaluation about being opposed to new ‘systems of prescription’ - balanced with increased authority for HT. Inequity of system - deprivation of school compared with leafy lanes - viewed by Inspectors as one size fits all model.- experienced as deskilling</p> <p>Report: New teachers coming in downloading lessons differing philosophy. Conflict with new initiatives. Increasing pressure and workload of Teachers. Bullying of OFSTED and LA.</p> <p>Report of increasing workloads in last few years of Headship accompanied by paranoid fears and nightmares – report of stress. Started to get worried about the responsibilities- ‘paranoid about things going wrong, child accident/death. Thinking about work all the time/nightmares.</p> <p>General report of HT covering stress up followed by Report of Suicides of HT x2</p> <p>Report of own breakdown. Feeling unable to make decisions.- and conflict with one parent. Time off – never went back. Breakdown</p> <p>Report of illness and decision to retire. Counsellor ‘I think you are doing the wrong job’</p> <p>Evaluation about HT strategies of working harder culminating in depression and stress.</p> <p>Evaluation: All Heads feel they are the only ones that are not coping/ but ‘actually 80% are not’ H&amp;S /fewer people primary heads can delegate to – in small schools have to do everything</p> <p>Type of Bereavement General report of leaving work.</p> <p>HT suffering related to other staff and children. Achievers’ non achievers no balance in Education policy</p>

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